

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE DIALOGICAL METHOD AND ROLE OF TEACHER IN THE DIALOGICAL METHOD AND THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY

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### 1. About the dialogical method

#### 1.1 Definition

The dialogical method can be defined as a heuristical method, produced by at least two speakers, when the communication is assumed explicitly and when the reversibility of the sentences covers a range of relationships with specific terms and effects such as:

- Reciprocity between speaker and public, generating verbal action, communication,
- Complementarity between partners (proponent - opponent), with the correlated effect – communication,
- Mutuality between persons (ego - alter), which leads to ideas communion (new) and to communication based upon them.

#### 1.2. Marks of dialogue

The marks of dialogue can be configured at least by the following aspects:

- The dialogue begins in an *open debate*, marked by interrogative curiosity and honesty among the participants beyond their positions and various arguments;
- By dialogue it is satisfied the *need to contact* the interlocutor's thought as well as to verify one's own capacities of understanding and interpreting;
- The dialogue is the participants' mutual benefit, meaning that solitary meditation is not enough for anyone; it must be supplemented and it is subject to corrections following the way of otherness (the way of the significant other). Thus, the dialogue has the benefit of revised statements and, by this, may go beyond the unilateral and dogmatic points of view;
- Dialogue as a method is also efficient from a psychological and spiritual perspective, for its *capacity to involve* the partners and its force to raise conscientiousness, force due to comparative judgment, critical thinking upon one's own products, the need to open a public debate on the value

of certain statements, the re-examining and re-formulating them better for the participants. Let's not forget that the dialogue must proceed towards a thinking which is more adequate, more just, more conform to the data, freedoms and constraints coming from reality;

- On the other hand, dialogue can be considered as a *temporary unifying knowledge* approach, essentially open to new (dialogical) experiences, because those carrying the dialogue agree upon the necessity of a critical – reflexive approach, as a measure of precaution against the danger of establishing a partial truth as final truth. Thus understood, the dialogue becomes a research way, a working method looking for contradiction not to tolerate it, but to overcome it;
- The dialogue requires discipline, which assumes *its openness to all kind of human experiences*, personal, interpersonal and socio – cultural. Such openness has a shaping effect upon intolerance, arrogance and excessive criticism, as well as upon other forms of taking away the inner democracy of the method. It is always useful to remind, from this point of view, the ethical side of the method;
- The dialogical method involves at all levels of didactical experience and knowledge *operating with the fear of making a mistake*, which assumes tacit openness to unexpected, as well as the capacity to efficiently integrate the significance, even with the price of reviewing certain fundamental statements, involved up to a certain point in the debate.

## **2. The structure of the dialogical method and the necessary steps in its implementation**

The structure of the dialogical method puts in a better light the existence of a complex of elements composing it, organized in a certain way, stable and recognizable, beyond the contexts and various results accompanying it. The structure's elements organize themselves in specific activity sequences, interdependent, which cannot be eluded without compromising the method as a whole. These sequences areas follows.

### **2.1. Questioning the theme**

*Questioning the theme* represents the starting point of the method organizing the aggregate of exercises contained by the method. What questioning means? It means transforming the affirmation in an interrogation, it means "seeing the question behind the statement", "the interrogation under the statement" (Russ, 1999).

What questioning means for the teaching of Philosophy, whether the dialogue takes place in a classroom or in a lecture room? There is no philosophical approach without questioning: the questioning is made either

by descriptive-affirmative analysis, or by interrogation. For instance, the Kantian questions concerning the human condition (What may I know? What may I hope? What ought to be done? What is man?) call each of them for a previous questioning approach in order to establish the area of the issue and its further widening. What questioning means in this case: acknowledging the difficulty of the answer beyond its apparent evidence. This way of being of philosophy finds itself in the act of its birth, by interrogating the principles of mythical explanation of the world. We remind here Socrates' example, which, as we know, leads questioning towards its best: What is virtue? What is right? What is beauty? etc. are questions that beyond their simple appearance build up a questioning approach leading to difficulties hard to overcome.

The teacher's role in this frame is to organize dialogue, to establish the theme and underline its area and importance within the subject it serves. The teacher is also the one organizing the questioning of the theme, operating with the right number of opening questions, in order to fully meet the goals for which the systematic questioning is done:

- we are talking about a theoretical goal, that of carefully framing the debated theme, due to epistemic reasons, but also economic ones upon we have already made short references,
- one goal attached to a communicational intentionality that intends to unlock communication and engage as many students as possible in debates by stimulating their curiosity for the chosen theme, by actualizing the knowledge they already have either from the study of different subjects, or from other information sources (outside the school), knowledge which can be reevaluate in the new context,
- one goal with a psychological feature intending to create a certain atmosphere friendly to exchanging ideas, mutual trust among participants, students and teachers as well, provoking students' curiosity for what is next in the lesson, provoking their cognitive motivation,
- one practical goal on the strength of which the teacher states the technical conditions of carrying out the lesson, announces the materials he is going to use (documentaries, sketches, maps, collections of texts, author volumes etc.) and which the students will use, reminds (if necessary) the basic rules of communication and interaction among students and between students and the teacher.

## **2.2 Framing the main problem and the theme**

*Framing the main problem and the theme* and formulating it as issue – questions, questions whose tension requires an answer representing another important methodological sequence. On the way it is formulated the issue –

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question depend not only the debut of the debate, but also the whole dialogue, its dynamic and constructive tension and probably most of the way it will end by formulating the conclusions. Within the study of philosophy, the problem is the one bringing in the debate the true theoretical fundament of a theme: it is the base for the exercises provoked and carried out, their heuristical line, it is what unites and leads the questions and answers to the conclusions.

The philosophical issue is not like a scientific problem. *Solving* it, as the peak in the approach of a scientific problem is substituted, within philosophy, to *clarification, organizing* better than it already is the sequence of questions, to operating with leaving aside the prejudices and biases, to *installing a conceptual rationality against the sensitive illusion and common opinion*. Within the science, the problem may disappear once it is solved. Within philosophy the problem may persist in an analyzing plurality and its very solution is always amendable.

For the experience of students' first contact and familiarizing with philosophy, as well as for a deeper study, the following steps are important from a didactical point of view:

- clear identification of the philosophical problem, its area and specific horizon, without overlapping it to specific approaches coming from the fragments in the text book or other bibliographical sources;
- not mistaken the problem by reducing it (and profaning it) with one of the senses it is associated at the level of common representations (for instance, the problem of freedom is not to be mistaken to its ordinary representations, nor to its political, juridical, moral hypostasis etc.)
- not settling in a dogmatic and one-sided way to formulations of the problem which one author or another consecrated. Beyond their value upon which the philosophical thought must reevaluate again and again, philosophy depends on the plurality of ideas and must fund there its concepts and most general judgments, in order not to become biased or dogmatic.

The teacher is responsible for the clarity and accuracy of the question – problem. Discussing the role of the teacher at this point and beyond, we should remember that in order to gain the attention of the class and of the seminar, as well as for the general success of the educative endeavor proposed by this method, the way the questions are crafted and presented is of great importance. Therefore:

- Every question represents a request for information, a gaping of missing information in a determined field. To request an answer presupposes, therefore, to know how to provoke it, to solicit it by clear formulations and avoiding repetitions and interrogative overlapping that would disorient more than help. The way the teacher formulates the questions are very important, as well as the possibility for the pupils to ask questions, for the success of the method and especially for the acquisitions that may be obtained through

this experience. The teacher can be a model for some of the pupils or students, that have become disciples in respect to the way questions are asked (without ostentation and without aggressiveness), so that they may fulfill their main role as instruments of search and progress in knowledge;

- On the other hand, we cannot avoid reminding an aspect that has clear connotations at cognitive and educative level, namely that a question represents a form of thought. Because of this the questions should not be formulated beyond or below the capacity to respond of the participants to the dialogue, but in the area of judgment and knowledge in which they know or think (with optimism) to have certain competence.

The displacement, during the dialogue, of the focus from questions as means to verify and evaluate on questions designed as instrument to orient the thinking and study in the field of knowledge, which means that the road from the unknown to the known is in the care of each and every participant, student or pupil, leads, naturally, to the democratization of the role of the question in the economy of the lesson. On the basis of this experience each of the participants to the dialogue may ask questions, because of the need to solicit the clarification of the information possessing at a given time.

### **2.3. Raising up the issue itself**

*Raising up the issue itself* represents the sequence of activities that presupposes the division of the question in parts or themes with a smaller span than the question, that are more easily analyzable each in part and more accessible as to their meaning.

The role of the teacher in this sequence of the method is to help (the pupils first and the students if necessary) to discover the significant parts for the understanding of the issue, to familiarize them with systematic and methodic work, by which no important part of it remains undiscussed.

### **2.4. The analytical proceeding**

*The analytical proceeding* presupposes the careful analysis of the cases, situations, texts, documents or auxiliary materials so that nothing remains left behind from what is significant as to the possible solution to the question-issue.

The teacher will supervise, when necessary, the proper time allotting for this activity, given the predilection of pupils to linger more on the moments for analysis. Also, he will be careful so that the analytic moment will not become superficial, because on its quality are depending the partial synthesis moments and the reaching of conclusions. More, the profundity of the later can be framed only on the basis of acquisitions and analyzing capacities that come not only through the study of philosophy, but which in the context of this subject receives specific connotations and dimensions.

Also, we are referring to what can be called analytical responsibility in the sense that pupils are involved in the analytical proceedings that they are conducting not only as cognitive beings, but also as willful and passionate beings, with personal options and preferences. From this point of view it is very important that, already in the matter here discussed, the pupils learn to make an honest analysis, shielded from subjectivity. Only when the obtained data will be ordered in series of reports unanimously accepted these will be in position to express subjective views also, with a personal tint. This way, through comparative exercise and progressive deliberation, is established the validity of data, compared to and separated from partisan points of view that are marginal and accidental.

### 2.5. Synthetic proceeding

The synthetic proceeding refers to bringing together the obtained data from the analysis of the main components of the problem and the reconstruction of the road from parts to the whole that is the issue itself. The reconstruction of the whole from the analyzed elements is done making connections, bridges and mediating between them. The collective result of the analytical proceeding brings, thus, elements of novelty on the field of knowledge, bringing to light aspects that initially could have only been guessed at, refines the understanding of connections between elements of the problems, placing them in the zone of central or secondary interest in relation to the issue at hand.

The roles of the teacher in this moment are the following:

- to guide the pupils in their search for the most valid partial solutions to the given problem. This task is not easy, because it presupposes the maintaining of a good balance between the individual research of the pupils and teamwork, so that neither the individual merits, nor the results obtained by the class as a whole are ignored;
- to be careful that in the process of rising the thinking of the pupils from the particular to the general there will be avoided the clichés that come from the social representations that are common at a certain time in the communities from which they come, where are considered as truth.
- to use comparison, progressive deliberation, value decantation, reflective spirit and conceptual construction as necessary and unavoidable exercises, according to the range of the considered problem. It is the moment to call the attention the fact that the *de facto* engagement in the elaboration of the partial synthesis of the knowledge data and, finally, their participation to the arriving at the final conclusion of the dialogue represents a sure way to mature thinking for them. The visible effects of the maturation mentioned by us consists, at least, in not confusing the whole with a part and not making in unilateral judgments (partial conclusions); also, there is the question of the possibility of discerning between objective understanding perspectives on problems discussed through relating to the partisanship or subjectivism that

accompanied them before the constitution by them of the field of exercises already mentioned; finally, there is the question of feeding a certain gnosiological optimism on the basis of which the participants may realize that the possibility of arriving to more and more general and correct conclusions is not the exclusive prerogative of the teacher and that they are capable of this kind of performances. The confidence in the power of personal reflection in arriving to articulate by oneself correct judgments and conclusions generates a positive attitude towards working with ideas, philosophical texts, confidence that can inform any future learning experience.

## **2.6. The optimal relation between the plurality of ideas and their thematic coherence**

*Offering an optimal relation between the plurality of ideas and their thematic coherence* represents a sequence of great importance in the general frame of the method. It is well known the fact that between the methodological precepts appreciated especially in modern didactics the necessity of activating the pupils and students, provoking them to participate to organized activities imbedded in the educational process ranks in the front. It supports the need to cultivate the spirit participation to the organized activities related to lessons or seminars, to the making of judgments etc., actions taken to be natural ways and conform with the normal reactions of those that take part in the educational relations. We should mention at this time that the educational relation, thus understood, is symmetrical as to its possibility to communicate (emitting, receiving, re-acting) of the participants, the educated and educators alike. What separates the places of the participants are the roles that they assume in its context, that is those who teach and educate the young generation in virtue of the social role invested in them by society and for the those who have chosen for themselves the profession and those that are taught and educated, given that the process of socialization and integration for them cannot take its course without the acquiring of an optimal level of knowledge necessary for life orientation and without the assimilation of certain and stabile values, by which the community expresses its rules and perspectives.

From the standpoint of our interest for the dialogic method the need pupil participation in the opinion forming process is not justified only from the aforementioned precept. The invoked productivity has as its main focus the reconstruction, for these, of the debated issues' context, its nuanced understanding, the containing of a narrow spirit, as well as the timely prevention of any form of dogmatism. As intrinsic sequences, implied by the discussion method's spirit itself, the objectives mentioned are congruent with the imperative contained in the educational precept invoked.

We cannot dialogue fruitfully on a given topic in the absence of a plurality of ideas regarding it, as we cannot lose sight of the fact that not every statement made in its literality may be useful for us for its nuanced understanding. To

separate from further intrusions, that are marginal or accidental to the subject the main context of ideas represents one of the permanent obligation of the teacher, one of the things to keep an eye on for the preservation of the debate on the subject, as well as keeping the intention clear for avoiding to fall in the irrelevant. Insisting this way in the work with pupils, the teacher will make them used to be truly productive as to the ideas relative to a given subject. For the work with students, also, the question of balancing plurality and coherence is an important aspect. It is about not wasting energy into looking for many answers that are poorly linked to the problem-question and its center of interest, about concentrating the interest of the participants and reminding them as often it is necessary the fact that a problem does not exist outside its solutions.

Another aspect, related to the technical side of utilizing the method, should be mentioned. We should warn about the fact that the more profound the analytical proceeding is the more articulate becomes and the clearer remains the thematic unity of the debates. Also, the more theoretically prepared the participants are, the more balanced the dialogue will be harmonizing the plurality of ideas and the thematic coherence, not only in extension, but in profundity, that is regarding the depth of the judgments arrived at and the answers formulated.

### **2.7. Approach towards results and the forming of conclusions**

*The approach towards results and the forming of conclusions* represents the sequence in which the entire edifice of ideas realized through analytical effort and synthesis adapts itself and is fixed into clearly articulated forms. We can talk about situations in which there is one or more conclusions following the debates, their plurality not being a sign of an impossibility to deliberate, but of the conservation of the dialectical spirit that cannot be foreign to dialogical perspective in any of its moments, including the conclusive one.

The role of the teacher consists in the help given to the class in formulating the conclusions. In these situations we have a logical component of the intervention that serves to limit or eliminate some cognitive difficulties that can surface on the road to elaborate conclusions by the pupils, given their limited capacity for abstraction and generalization. On the other hand there is a psychological component that we have to consider and that aims to minimize, as much as possible, the pupils' fears that stem from the learning experience, such as fear of error or the trivialization of the result of their thinking, either by a part of the class or by the professor. This is the time to recall that the dialogical method is a profoundly democratic method that brings and maintains an honest competition between the participants. The role of the professor is to keep the spirit of participation to the dialog of the pupils alive, without preferences or discriminations and to remind when necessary the ethical implications of the participation to relation to the others.

### **2.8. Establishing the accord to end the dialogue**



*Establishing the accord to end the dialogue* is to be done in virtue of the realization that, at least for the span of one course, or seminar sufficient steps have been made towards a deeper and more proper understanding of some ideas. The accord for the closing of the dialogue is requested precisely on the basis of such realization.

The clear and stable structure of the dialogue method can be found in any seriously pursued didactic context. To avoid the danger leveling and that of methodological reductionism we remind that the method in question is flexible as to the specificities of various subjects, to the content and the specific work possibilities of the pupils or students, as well as their experience in undertaking a dialogue. It follows, of course, that in the educational practice one and the same method will vary as to its form from subject to subject and from one didactic context to the other. It is about different accents as to the interest given to one or the other of the elements that make up the structure of the method, in its general developing, about the kind of exercises selected in the making of the method, about the objectives that were set. Thus, for example, one of these variations may be provoked by the issue to be studied, its character that can be more or less accessible, the level of familiarity of the pupils or students with it, that require different attention and amount of time given from one lesson to the other or from seminar to the other as to the questioning and shaping of the sphere of the central problem. Of course, when the issue is one that has been substantially publicized, such as the issue of human rights, for example, the moment of starting the debating of the issue is reduced because it is accessible to many pupils. The main accent will be on the diversity of opinions among the participants to the dialogue and the maintaining of an optimal balance between plurality and unity.

The diversity of competences on the part of pupils or even students as to their problem solving capabilities in the field of human studies is another factor that generates variations in the application of the said method. Thus, for instance, for the experience accumulated before the end of High School it is illustrative the tendency to operate more analytically than synthetically. This situation can be explained by the higher frequency of exercises of analytical character, that pupils face in school, through the various learning situations, as well as by a certain behavioral stereotype of many of the teachers in avoiding moments of synthesis during lessons, a stereotype that we only wish to mention here, without insisting on its nature or reason. We are faced, in these learning situations, in extreme cases, to activities dominated excessively by the analytical, the synthetical being left aside or pushed away, and the teacher enunciates the solution to the problem *ex abrupto*. On the other hand we have statistically less frequent experiences, but that are illustrative nevertheless for our discussion, experiences in which, realizing the necessity of increasing the frequency of synthetic exercises during lessons proceed to provoking them without sufficient logical and argumentative bases.

### 3. General rules for using the dialogue method in the educative process

Following the Cartesian model we can say that practicing a certain method, in our case the dialogue method, means, first of all, to guide well our thinking, through fundamental rules “for it is not sufficient to have a refined spirit, the important thing is to make a good use of it” (Descartes, 1996, p. 114). The act of well conducting our reason is not a gift but is obtained through a creation (a conscientious and undertaking n. n.) organized around some rules.

#### 3.1. Goals in practicing the didactic dialogue method

What is a rule, from the standpoint of practicing the didactic dialogue method? It presupposes the unification of diverse contents from the perspective of some systematically followed goals or objectives that are:

- a. Cognitive (understanding, elaborating, learning concepts etc. and discovering relation between them),
- b. Learning dialogue rules (to formulate, re-formulate, critique, reject, accept etc., to which we attach the ethical dimension of these),
- c. To form skills (exercise, compare, deliberate, re-create, construct etc., as well as things relating to communicational components implicated in the dialogic endeavor)

#### 3.2. Rules for using the dialogic method in the didactic activity

The general rules for using the dialogic method in the didactic activity can be developed in the following directions:

- *clear delimitation of the meaning of concepts* with which we operate. Determining the essence and the comprehension permits us to identify the concepts discussed, their meaning, and to stay on course with the subject.
- *ordering the dialogic approach* going from simple to complex. The quality of the dialogue depends in great measure on the order established between ideas through the succession of questions and answers that is ordering of these. For example, the issue of “order and disorder” can be approached in the dialogue method in the context of the philosophy lesson, by separating the discussed concepts from the images that circulate at the level of common representations about order and disorder, identifying their specific situations. By the ordered and organized sequence of the questions of the dialogue the data will be discussed, it will be put together with the data given by the texts of the manual. Proceeding now synthetically, the dialogic discourse will reconstruct the dynamic of the relations between order and disorder, considered conceptually.

- *assuring an internal dynamic of the concepts*, in the sense that philosophical terms rarely presuppose or request immobile definitions. This dynamic or mobility has to point to the mobility of thought, to the producing of concepts that are born in a natural way, one from the other. Recognizing it is a creator act that draws the chain of ideas and arguments in a natural way, than may have as consequence the putting aside of the artificial character of the dialogue and the conviction of the participants as to their own capacity to participate effectively to the debate over the proposed issue.
- *the rule of choosing the issue* refers to the fact that an important question formulated by the teacher or present in a text cannot be tacitly passed by, unless temporarily, generally for reasons of logical and psychological precaution.
- *resolving the problem* is under the specific sign of the dialogue method, of the intrinsic spirit of dialogue, and a genuine openness to revision, if we accept that the method can bring together two main forms of solutions.

A. A closed form, that constitutes a definitive response to the question, response that has a verified scientific value, is validated and uncontested. In these frames the thinking of the pupils moves on historical coordinates that remake "in short" the way to constitute the truth in the history of philosophy, for example.

B. An opened form, in the frames of which the solutions, in order to maintain their value of truth have to remain permeable to later reevaluations of the issue, to its reinterpretation and change in its significance, as often as it is necessary.

In the coexistence of the two forms of solving the problem and their merging following logical and demonstrative necessities consists one of the key of the success of the using of the dialogue method in the didactic practice.

Thus:

- it is about using in a measured way a certain number of closed solutions, in a way that at the end of the lesson the pupils are in possession of answers that are certain and do not need further revision. This is linked to the comfort of thinking, to the fact that after each lesson they need to feel that they are in possession of a new truth, that a progress in thinking has been made compared to the previous lesson. On the other hand, this way of resolving problems in the context of the lessons is an example for the progressive character of knowledge and the necessity to realize the educational imperative of learning as a progressive following of the road of thinking from simple to complex.
- It is about utilizing, also with measure, the solving with open answers, that have a frequency linked at least to the following considerations:

C. The quality of the dialectic exercise practiced during the lesson that has been imposed as a natural attitude, (relatively) frequent in solving problems in class, doubt, the concentration on the truthfulness of at least some of the

answers, the keeping awake the conscience on the fact that some solutions are temporary and that they request by necessity a reformulation in more advanced stages of study;

D. The understanding and periodical demonstration of the fact that truth is relative and that the exercise of its obtaining is not without searching, research, interrogation and self-interrogation;

E. The fact that the experience gained during lessons practiced by this method protects both pupils and teachers from the danger of dogmatism, the imposition of some solutions by the argument of their exclusive truth. On the basis of these considerations we believe we may affirm not only the instructional role of the method, but its profoundly formative role as well. It is the moment to underline the fact that the frequent utilization of the method in the study of philosophy, besides the particularities of natural contextualization is directly responsible for a common result that has to be reached by the philosophy teachers together with those that are under their guidance, namely that of cultivating reflexive thinking, to form and develop the spirit of critical analysis, interrogation and self-interrogation, all these being long term acquisitions, whose instrumental value passes beyond the gates of the school.

To put explicitly into light the practical-applicative intention of the details mentioned so far we propose a brief scheme of the main ideas, in terms of some directions for action that should be followed or avoided in the teaching practice.

<i>To be followed</i>		<i>To be avoided</i>	
1	To analyze and unfold every idea – problem, identifying its main elements	1	To proceed without analyzing consistently and without differentiating the problems in their components
2	To establish relations between the concepts and to circumscribe the didactic discourse of exterior forms in the organized frame of the lesson	2	To minimize or ignore the conceptual connections, during the philosophy class
3	To operate with a unifying idea	3	To work without organization, dispersing the pupils' ideas as well as the activities within the lesson
4	To put in practice the internal dynamic of the concepts and their creative productivity	4	To situate the approach at a descriptive-dogmatic level

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5	To put in form of interrogation the major themes	5	To remain only at the affirmative level in presenting the problems given by the textbook
6	To formulate carefully the questions and order them rationally	6	To formulate repetitive and/or in lack of order
7	Sincerity in the undertaking and openness towards revisiting the ideas expressed	7	To repudiate the superior tone and omniscience

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