



## The Concept of Dialogue in Contemporary Humanistic Education

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The concept of a dialogue appeared already in ancient times, in Greece. Ancient thinkers thought that dialogue helped both to develop knowledge (science) and to shape man's character, to develop man's individuality and in result particular personality. Dialogue was treated as an instrument helping to realize certain aims, and was perceived as: method of education (Socrates), method of getting knowledge (Plato), art of dispute (Aristotle). There is no doubt that from its very beginning dialogue was connected with education. Such dialogue is also possible in regard to small children when one wants to introduce them the world of books.[1]

Let us first try to define the notion of dialogue (meeting, encounter). Dialogue appears when there is the relation with the Other, coexistence with the Other. Martin Buber, constructing his philosophy of dialogue, bases it on some axiomatic assumptions, like: "In the beginning I the relation", and "All actual life is encounter." [2] Dialogue is therefore a certain process of both intellectual, psychical and moral nature, thanks to which there appear some changes in both I and You.

The concept of education is really a very wide one. It includes in itself the process of passing some knowledge to pupils but also educating conceived as shaping pupils' characters on the way of striving to achieve the peaks of one's potential humanity. There appear therefore different meetings: teacher – pupil(s), pupil – pupil, and also both teachers and pupils remain in some relation to the knowledge which they acquire within a given subject (in different degrees of course), the knowledge constituted, developed and shaped historically. The dialogue undertaken by the participants of the educational situation enables them to increase knowledge, to enrich their personal experience of the world of culture, nature, and – last but not least - of themselves. Considering the dialogue in its different aspects may help to realize its specific role within the domain of education, especially education in humanities. The aim of teaching humanities in school is the initiation and development of critical thinking in young men, therefore of such intellectual and psychical qualities as: trying to perceive reality as a whole (holistic view), aiming at clear thinking, working out a critical attitude to reality and to oneself, ability of clear and precise formulation of one's thoughts. Henryk Elzenberg, formulated some rules that should oblige in discussion: the opponent should be always treated with respect, our formulations concerning what we claim should be most precise (the same refers to the opinions with which we disagree), we should avoid unnecessary digressions, our opinions should be rationally supported, we should carefully listen to the arguments of the opponents and answer them.[3] The usage of such method during lessons helps to solve not only purely theoretical problems, but also practical ones.

The specifics of humanities consists, among others, in this that there appear different, often divergent and excluding themselves, theoretical standpoints. Sciences in general, as opposed to humanities, usually propose one definite solution of a particular problem, whereas in case of humanities we most often can supply no single definite answer to a given question. In connection with this there appears the danger of skepticism, subjectivism and relativism. The teacher should be aware of such danger and should underline that in humanities the different standpoints usually co-exist, they co-clarify themselves and influence each other. During discussion questions and answers may eventually lead to a deep understanding of the problem under discussion.

Of course there also appear some opponents as regards the dialogical teaching who claim that the method of posing questions and answering them may lead to chaos. This may sometimes happen but a good teacher should know how to lead discussion, how to manage the whole dialogical situation. He needs to be tolerant, open and ready for cooperation. The teacher does not stick only to descriptions and definitions but tries to explain humanistic phenomena and to evaluate them. Critical analysis is necessary in such context; the teacher is supposed to teach his pupils such analysis. In school literature, art, history, philosophy, political sciences intertwine together and no answer to a given problem can in fact be treated as final and decisive. Particular problems should be presented and discussed in such way that pupils do not fall under the spell of destructive skepticism and relativism. The teacher should not only present facts, e.g. historical, he should provoke his pupils to work out their own independent opinion in certain matters, for example of ethical (moral) nature. As Ryszard Wiśniewski writes: "In educational perspective the primary task of ethics is first of all awakening, sustaining and development of moral sensitivity towards the complexity of the world of values." [4] The pluralism of standpoints in ethics may be revealed only in creative dialogue.

Young men most often have a view of the world of their own. Teachers usually want to deepen, extend and develop it. They also try to make their pupils more sensitive to some values, especially to those desirable from the social point of view. The life of the young generation is usually full of moral dilemmas of different kind. Young people are ready to defend their worldview on the one hand, but they are ready to widen and modify it on the other. They have their own experience connected with evil, but also with good. A teacher, involved in dialogue with them, should try together with young men to discover the causes of evil, understand how evil is done and try to work out certain moral norms which detect evil and prevent it. This should be done by means of discussion, within true, sincere dialogue. But no single definite vision of the world should be imposed upon pupils. They should understand that the world can be interpreted in many different ways, that in the humanities there are



usually numerous interpretations possible. In this context we can distinguish three kinds of dialogue. Firstly: the dialogue of a pupil with oneself, the so called internal dialogue, which is negated by Martin Buber, who thinks it to be a false dialogue, in fact a monologue. But I think that such internal dialogue is possible, in this context I would like to recall the views of Reinhold Niebuhr believing in such inner dialogue.[5] Secondly: the dialogue of a teacher with a pupil, which is of greatest interest to us from the point of view of pedagogy. Thirdly: the dialogue among pupils, especially when the problem discussed is of importance to them. The problems presented within humanities often refer to practical things, practical problems which should be solved and then realized in practice. This is especially important in case of – what I call - applied humanities. During dialogue pupils learn how to solve problems, what methods are available in this respect. Discussions should lead to some definite capacities (skills) and not only to some knowledge, which is relatively easy to find in era of Internet to which access is so easy (laptops, mobile phones). Discussions and dialogue should refer to particular, individual experiences of the teacher and the pupils, but also to some imaginary situations, for example to the situations one finds in literature. Teaching in such context is rather like leading, stimulating thinking how to solve a given practical problem.

In the dialogical situation both the teacher and the pupil become partners. The openness of the teacher should lead to the openness of the pupil. This openness then leads to mutual understanding of the partners of the dialogue and there is also possibility (but no certainty) of achieving a mutual, common solution of a given problem. Educating by means of dialogue allows the teacher to present his own views but he should not try to impose them on his pupils. The dialogue may be led on the basis of some short, introductory lecture on the problem or on the basis of reading of some short texts referring to a given problem. Then an open, free, spontaneous dialogue may appear.

Dialogue as a form of teaching in humanities learns how to be close to social reality, to other men. To achieve a desirable situation some things are needed. Open thinking means that both teachers and pupils want to widen their intellectual horizons and that they respect new ideas, although such ideas may differ from the ones they possess. Wide horizons mean that one accepts attitudes and views of the others even in the situation when one does not share such views. It seems that dialogue can help not only to achieve agreement on certain matters but also may help to sustain and affirm differences among men. Tolerating others' views means that one does not use force to convince others to one's own views. Dialogical teaching aims at tolerance, both in a theoretical and in practical dimension. The dialogue helps to awaken ethical sensitivity towards others which constitutes the basis of humanistic bonds among men in a given group (society). It helps to experience the Other as something unique, unrepeatable and as valuable as we are. Kindness is extremely important in this context. Czesław Znamierowski thinks kindness to be fundamental moral principle and writes that it: "...should direct man's actions and take care of the movements of the heart and motives of action."[6] Kindness seems to be of utmost importance as far as social life, life in peace, is concerned. It certainly enables communication in social and personal spheres. Tolerance also contributes to the appearance of peace and similarly as hope it enables dialogue. According to Mieczysław Michalik dialogue and tolerance enable to overcome hatred in contemporary societies.[7] Humanity in man cannot be reduced to pragmatic, utilitarian relations only.

The dialogical education pays attention to freedom and responsibility connected with it. Józef Tischner writes: "A dispute about man's freedom interpenetrates almost from the beginning the European philosophical and religious traditions."[8] In this context it should be stressed that the category of equality is also very important. Especially when contemporary societies are so much multicultural it should be repeated again and again that the representatives of different races are equal, this axiomatic truth should certainly be internalized by pupils. Responsibility is also important, it corresponds to freedom and it is usually assumed that without freedom there is no responsibility.[9] Within given encounter the teacher is responsible for his pupils, their knowledge and the skills formed within educational process. Teaching young men responsibility belongs to the most important tasks of contemporary school. True dialogue helps to avoid dogmatism present in the traditional methods of teaching, methods which anyway may be sometimes supplemented by dialogue. Dialogue as such seems to have great potential in the context of teaching and should therefore be examined both by representatives of humanities and pedagogy as an efficient, fruitful instrument of educating young generations. According to Ireneusz Bittner axiological education should: help humans to be more humane, prevent man from degrading himself in contemporary technocratic-consumptive civilization, and direct man towards constant self-improvement.[10] One can only agree with the above opinion. I am deeply convinced that the dialogical education is especially endowed to realize such postulates.

## References

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