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## **Traditional Didactics vs. Modern Didactics. Dialogue, Lecture and Debate as active- participative methods useful to the teaching and learning activities of the social science disciplines**

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper intends to present the most significant differences between traditional and modern didactics, emphasizing the advantages or benefits brought by the modern educational paradigm both to the teacher and to the pupil, and analyzing dialogue, lecture and debate as active-participative methods useful and relevant for the teaching and learning activities of the social science disciplines in both pre-university and academic educational system.*

*Modern didactics highlights the need of establishing a partnership between teacher and pupil regarding the activities of teaching and learning. Modern education is centered on the learner and is not being considered as a framework for only the acquisition of knowledge, equally important being the development of competencies, skills and habits, all these to be instilled through the use of didactic methods specific to the content of every discipline studied and all having to be tailored in function with the actual level of knowledge already acquired by the pupils from each class. Nowadays, the purpose of the school is to prepare the student for the challenges of life, for integration and efficiency in the field of work, for choosing a career suited to his own interests and personal motivation, by developing his abilities of communication, of relating to the others, for assuming the involvement and responsibility for the learning or work-related tasks*

*performed, for acquiring the skills of autonomous and reflexive thinking.*

**Key words:** traditional didactics, modern didactics, dialogue, lecture, debate, efficient methods of teaching and learning, educational system, social science disciplines, teacher, learner.

## **Introduction**

In the traditional educational paradigm, the teacher had the decisive role in the teaching activity, meaning that he was the one that selected, provided and transmitted the content that has to be learned, controlling the content, the rhythm of teaching and the succession of the themes, structuring and organizing the information as he sees fit, following his own competencies and personal preferences.<sup>1</sup> Teaching was to be the activity of shaping the pupils' answers by strengthening those that were closest to the already-existing optimum answer, formulated before by the teacher. The learner as an object of the educative action had only an altogether passive role to fulfill during the process of teaching and learning. He had to be obedient, never to doubt the veracity of the information presented by the teacher and always to memorize this information as faithfully as he was able, in order to attain to a higher level of performance, quantified in school grades. The pupil was fully dependent on the teacher and on the knowledge transmitted by him, knowledge that the scholar was required to acquire without mediation, without filtering it through his own thinking, merely memorizing it mechanically. The teacher didn't intend to impart skills, competencies or habits to his pupils, but only to transmit knowledge that was considered to

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<sup>1</sup> The active, dynamic teacher "searches for the key to the knowledge storage that was to be inside the pupil's head, in order to fill it, insofar as his skills allowed this, with scientific goods of any kind." Okon, *Învățământul problematizat în școala contemporană*, 13.

be relevant, while simultaneously imposing upon his learner certain prescribed modes of thought and certain attitudes to be held with regard to certain texts, problems and situations.<sup>2</sup>

The specific didactic method of this traditional approach to education was the lecture as one-sided communicative act (the teacher speaks, while the pupils listen and write down the most important ideas). The lecture is a passive method, expositive, illustrative, centered on the teacher, who chooses the text, presents it in front of the class and comments upon it. Any dialogical exchange with the pupils is only occasional, episodic, intended to clarify the eventual misunderstandings related to what the teacher has just presented.

The main objections brought against this traditional didactics' vision on the roles of the pupil and teacher during the educational activities are centered on its ignorance of the mode in which information is processed during learning and respectively on the mode in which the answers are formulated. The traditional educational paradigm offers no flexibility for applying previously acquired knowledge to new contexts, is ineffectual in forming superior skills and competencies, in training critical and reflexive thinking, does not offer a satisfying explanation on the mechanisms of learning, and moreover, within it the pupil risks becoming a machine for automatically reproducing the answers he has been taught, without reflecting upon them, thereby failing to acquire any adequate understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> "In his turn, the pupil is obliged to be a relatively passive being, obedient, hard-working and dependent. It couldn't have been otherwise in traditional didactics, where the entirety of education was based on the pupils' memory. This didactics, treating the pupil as a vessel to be filled with knowledge, took no heed of the "vessel" itself, concentrating its efforts on the teacher, telling him how he "must" fill this "vessel". The pupil's passivity was eye-catching, not having anything else to do than to keep what he was "given" in pre-determined form. Under these conditions, the teacher wasn't directing the learning and development of his pupils, he was commanding them, forcing upon them his own knowledge and his own mode of thinking." Okon, *Învățământul problematizat în școala contemporană*, 13.

## **The advantages of the modern didactics. The role of the professor and the learner in the process of active teaching and learning**

The modern educational paradigm brings with it changes that are beneficial both for the pupils and for the teachers, regarding mainly the role that each side has to play inside the confines of teaching and learning process, and also the ends proposed for the process itself. The educational system of today is no longer centered on content, on the accumulation of knowledge, its ends being the development of learning strategies (meta-learning: learning how to learn, self-regulated learning) and the formation of skills, abilities, competencies (of communication, organization, collaboration, analytical thinking etc.) that are essential both to the pupils inside the learning environments and, later on, for life in the socio-economical environment. The purpose of the school is to provide the pupil training for his future integration in the field of work, to provide him the mental means of managing the contexts of his future life, an important one being the habit of independent thinking. For these reasons, modern didactics is interested not only in the manifest behavior of the pupils, but also by the cognitive processes that take place in the interval between input and output, by the mental mechanisms implied in the acquisition of knowledge and by the strategies for the improvement of learning. The activity of self-regulated learning presupposes the existence of some strategies for the control and regulation of one's own behavior of learning, of the emotional, cognitive and motivational resources involved, and also of the ability of managing the required time and effort resources. Such meta-cognitive strategies would help the pupil or student to achieve superior results, to become more competent in his activity field, to develop his capacities for autonomous learning, for management and control of his thoughts and emotions, to plan and monitor his learning activities with regard to his priorities

and established purposes, to manage efficiently the time allotted for study, to form the habits of creative thinking useful when working with texts, to allocate the attention resources needed for the efficient processing of information, to use certain strategies for the encoding, elaboration and classification of information so that it would be easier to recall it, to evaluate his own progress by establishing realist standards and in the development of a sense of self-efficiency.

The changing of the goals of the educational process, so as to include the gaining of meta-cognitive abilities besides the gaining of theoretical knowledge, guarantees a more efficient learning and a better adaptation of the graduate at his future workplace. School has to prepare the pupil for his future life, for an efficient integration in the field of work, by developing his abilities for communication, for relating to the others, by teaching him the value of responsibility for his own work or learning activity, the involvement in his work-task and also to help the learner in the choice of a suitable career, in relation with his own preoccupations and personal motivation. It has to be mentioned that if school cannot absolutely guarantee a future professional success, it nevertheless provides the basis for it, guiding the scholar in its direction, through the values and abilities, the knowledge and skills instilled into him during the formative years of schooling.

The modern educational methods are centered on the analysis of the modes through which the pupil is constructing representations, meanings, how he elaborates information that will be stored in his long-time memory to be anytime accessible. The accent is placed on the deep processing of the information with which the pupil has had contact (depth-understanding), on the mode in which he relates to it, on the construction of the meaning of the knowledge acquired through text analysis, on the processes of selection of relevant information, of elaboration of hypothesis, of critical reflection and text interpretation.

The learner is situated at the center of the educational process, being the subject of the educative-didactical actions. He is being encouraged to think independently, to express his own points of view, to assume responsibility for his own learning process, to become actively involved in acquiring knowledge and competencies, and to be able to apply these, through transfer in other new contexts. He is considered to be a potential researcher actively involved in the process of learning, that he aims to discover new knowledge and to continually enrich his knowledge. The mode in which the scholar relates to the new knowledge being acquired depends, to a large extent, on the contents and coherence of the sum of knowledge he already acquired, that constitutes the basis in which the new knowledge must be inserted into, and on the systematization of a mental chart where the new knowledge has to be linked to the old. The learner will assimilate more easily new knowledge, will be more motivated to learn, if these can be harmoniously linked to the previously acquired knowledge, if these belong to his area of interests, if their theme belongs to his preferences. In function with the existence of this link between old and new knowledge, the pupil/student will allocate the necessary attention resources, will organize and interpret the studied contents, will strive to understand the message of the texts he studies, storing the newly acquired information in his long-time memory. Learning becomes thus a flexible and interactive game played between the basis of already acquired knowledge and the new knowledge that wait to be integrated in the mental scheme.

### **Modern didactic methods and its benefits for the student and for the teacher**

The teacher no longer provides already structured and interpreted knowledge, becoming a facilitator, a mediator of the pupils' cognitive depth-processes, of the reflection and interpretations that they elaborate while are working with

texts (philosophical, literary, historical etc.). He guides the process of learning, monitoring the interpretation and understanding of texts by the pupils. He encourages the pupils' active involvement in learning and independent thinking, through stimulating dialogue, through debates, problem identification, teamwork (learning through collaboration), creative essays, text analysis. These didactical methods,<sup>3</sup> specific mainly to the disciplines from the field of social science, imply the need for interactive collaboration between student and teacher, helping the learner to develop certain key competencies, intellectual capacities, personal values and abilities: analytical competencies (critical thinking, interpretation, synthesis, the identification of relevant ideas), organizational competencies (leading a discussion, preparing a case study), competencies in communication (fluency in speech, coherency, the capacity to listen to the others, to accept different opinions about a situation, to formulate questions that lead, through small steps, towards finding the optimum solution), teamwork capacities (group activities, negotiation, tolerance, patience, respect for the other).

Each didactic method has its uses, but their value depends on the way they are applied and on the contents they are applied to. There are no methods that are desirable or undesirable in themselves, only methods that are more suited at forming the competencies and abilities specific to a certain discipline. The choice of the most efficient didactic method should be made with reference to the expected results of the instructive-educative process, to the goals that are to be achieved at the end of the course in that respective discipline, to the specific contents presented through the activity of

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<sup>3</sup> "The didactic method indicates an efficient way of organization and implementation of the instructive-educative practices, that has to be systematically correlated with the other components of the instruction process." Albulescu, Diaconu, *Repere actuale în didactica disciplinelor socio-umane*, 7.

teaching, to the age and learning particularities of the pupils and, respectively, to the experience and competencies of the teachers.

### **a) The didactic dialogue**

The didactic dialogue, as a bilateral comprehensive act, mediated through gestures, language, expressions, represent an interaction between teacher and pupils, based on a mutual exchange of ideas sustained through clear logical arguments. It presupposes an attitude of openness towards the other, the acceptance of the diversity of opinions, the respect towards the other without which true communication cannot take place. Using the famous Theory of The Self developed by George Herbert Mead in "*Mind, Self and Society*", Monica Diaconu transposes it to the educational system, explaining that in the shadow of the external dialogue, of the teacher-pupil interaction, there is always an internal dialogue, taking place inside the cognitive level of each subject. This internal dialogue is the psychological mechanism through which the subject's argumentation is built, through which the subject forms his opinion about a situation or subject, on the basis of which he may provide his answer to the other, to his interlocutor. The other constitutes a fundamental element of this internal dialogue, being the instance that must pass validation upon the subject's opinion, thereby proving itself a powerful influence on the subject's mode of thinking. In Mead's theory, the other's attitude and expressed opinion, influences from the outside the internal dynamics of the self, effecting changes upon it, changes of significant magnitude upon the subject's perception of self and on the social conduct that the individual will adopt. According to this theory, from his dialogue with this other, the individual will adopt and internalize the other's attitude and position, even if these are contrary to his own position, because only in this way can be bridged the gap between the irreducible and unique individualities brought together in the action of

communication, the gap that separates each individual person's world of signifiers. Once internalized inside one's own experience, the other's attitude and position join the individual's own voice, becoming a part of the interior discourse of one's own self, a voice of the internal dialogue that marks the act of thinking. As such, the other's opinion becomes available for critical analysis, when the individual may try to understand the other's point of view and what may be the other's reaction to his own arguments. Through such internal dialogue the individual defines his self image – the mode in which he perceives himself – and his worldview, in function of which he adopts a certain form of social conduct and decides upon his actions.

The didactic dialogue<sup>4</sup> as an active-participative heuristic modern method gives proof of the power of the word, the *logos*, the language through which we think, through which we may have access to the other's thoughts, we may get to know him, to revise our own opinions, to reach consensus with him. Being open towards the other implies an attitude of tolerance, of respect given to the other as to a fellow human being, renouncing at cynicism, arrogance and at the attitude of hatred towards the other as a stranger to be feared. The method of the dialogue as an educational instrument is efficient insofar it determines the pupils to think, it helps them develop socializing skills (communicational competencies), helping them to express themselves freely, to expose their own opinions and vision, to offer and receive feedback, to listen to what others have to say, to clearly formulate questions and answers so that they may progress towards the resolution of the problem at hand. Through dialogue, the pupils may augment the basis of their knowledge, dialogue opening them the horizon of general culture, facilitating the acceptance of cultural diversity. The

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<sup>4</sup> Dialogue is "the maximum point of methodological activism". Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 45.

method of the dialogue cultivates reflexive thinking, develops and forms the spirit of critical analysis, the spirit of interrogation and self-interrogation, understood as long-term acquisitions, useful also in the environments outside school.<sup>5</sup>

The teacher has to provide and help maintain the optimum environment for dialogue to take place, to establish its rules, to stimulate the pupils' interest for dialogue and its subject-matter, to provide mediation, to unblock communication, to stimulate the pupils' motivation towards involvement in the work task, to uphold the order and respect necessary for dialogue to take place.<sup>6</sup> By making practical use of such methods during the activity of teaching new contents, the teacher actually leads the pupils' thinking, without involving himself directly through providing the answer for the discussed problem, leading them instead towards understanding, towards the realization of consensus, through open-ended questions that require reflection, analysis, objective interpretation, so that finally, at the end of the interactive message exchange between pupils and respectively between pupils and teacher, the learner would reach by themselves at the optimum answer.

## **b) The Lecture**

Even if today the lecture is considered to be an aged method, boring in the point of view of the pupils or students, it still has its uses, not being at all damaging to the formation of subjects and to their subsequent adaptation to the work field. The

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<sup>5</sup> "Critical thinking forms true citizens for an open society. Such citizens would have to be inclined to work together, but at the same time capable of leading; they have to manifest tolerance towards people coming from the most diverse environments, but at the same time to be able to give proof of individual initiative, they must be guided by principles, but nevertheless always able to provide solutions that adapt to a constantly changing reality." Flueraş, *Paidea și gândirea critică*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Dialogue "constitutes one of the most natural methods for the activation of subjects, on the basis of the existence of a common interest, built on motivations which move, always more significantly, towards intrinsic causes." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 45.

lecture is an efficient method in forming the basis of theoretical knowledge required to every expert for reaching adequate comprehension of his specialization field.<sup>7</sup> Lecture is the means through which the teacher forms his learners so that they will become future experts, specialists, professionals, a means of transmitting the relevant knowledge necessary for mastery of a domain of specialization. It may be said that it is the method of initiation for the novices of a specialization. The information presented by the teacher, resulted from his own experience of learning and research, will be the framework through which the pupil or student will establish his rapport with the relevant texts of his discipline and will construct their sense or signification.<sup>8</sup> The mode in which the teacher presents the information to the pupils/students may constitute a form of extrinsic motivation, leading to a process that would trigger the intrinsic motivation of the subjects, absolutely necessary for efficient learning and educational progress. The lectures must captivate the pupils' attention and their interest to study the problems presented. To this end, the transmitted information should be clearly formulated, its divers aspects well correlated between themselves, and theory should be adjoined by

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<sup>7</sup> "Let us not forget that, however great is someone's curiosity or passion, without a guide that guards over the systematization already invoked, over the coherency and continuity of the instruction and formation process, it would find itself, and not on few occasions, at the mercy of chance. Moreover, the level of theoretical commitments, scientific rigor, the value assumptions contained within the lecture's text represent an incommensurable offer with regard to the knowledge and understanding of a certain domain of reality: it's possible that no other method from the whole arsenal of didactical methodology has the means of providing simultaneously with horizontal knowledge, the result of inspecting the divers facets of a certain field and its interconnections with adjoining fields, as well as with vertical knowledge, the result of inspecting behavioral regularities within the field and the laws that govern it." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 45.

<sup>8</sup> "Information selection, the engagement of explanations, of demonstrations as well as of exemplifications, the assurance of an interior rhythm of the text, as well as of its internal coherence are all easier to achieve when there are guiding landmarks that fruitfully imprint upon the activity of generations of the young." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 45.

applicative examples from daily life.<sup>9</sup> The main competency that is developed through the method of the lecture is the competency to listen actively to that which the teacher presents, to listen while simultaneously thinking and taking notes.<sup>10</sup>

The critics of this method consider that "the role of the students is mainly a passive one, that they are condemned to accept as truth whatever is served up to them and to learn it as faithfully as possible".<sup>11</sup> A more careful observation of this method proves that this passivity of the students is merely an apparent one. Even if attentive, they are nevertheless active subjects of the educational act, possessing influence over the teaching rhythm, having the opportunity to ask their teacher questions and thus to provide him with feedback if some information imparted by him was not clearly understood. On the basis of this feedback, acting as a fail-safe of the communication process, the teacher may decide the necessity of taking up again the already presented material, giving it more detail and associating it with other information and examples, with the purpose of facilitating comprehension.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "How did Titu Maiorescu conceive his course of history of philosophy? Maiorescu's lectures were alive, he presented the (philosophical) systems with great clarity, bringing to the fore the coherence of the ideas composing those systems and besides the work he presented also the philosopher's life, with abundant biographical details; frequently he made ingenious applications, seeking to judge contemporaneous events through the prism of the ideas specific to the systems successively presented (which made for) the most lively part of his lecture, a part that was in truth only episodic, but full of meaning, for all those applications had educative value." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 48.

<sup>10</sup> Listening means "centering one's attention for a long time upon the information being transmitted and that requires the education of the will, the development of the motivation to study, to obtain correct information." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 49.

<sup>11</sup> Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 48.

<sup>12</sup> "In other words, the teacher is the one that manages the domain of the information, of its mode of structuring in parts of reasonable discourse that are didactically measured, while the students are those that through their reaction indicate towards what areas will the information be moved, what will be the extension of the offer of knowledge, what form will the suite of

### **c) The Debate**

If the lecture helps develop the pupil's competence of listening actively to what the teacher transmits, the debate helps develop his competencies to communicate, to socialize, to ask, to strive together with the others as a team for realizing a consensus. The debate as a heuristic method, either as part of dialogue or as an independent method, contributes towards the development of autonomous thinking, of the capacity of making connections between distinct information, of making use of the knowledge stored in the long-time memory and adapt it to the new context. The debate imposes a certain way of using questions that favors an orderly exchange of information between the partners, useful for solving a conflict of ideas or certain communicational situations (like a problem towards which every participating subject assumes a different position). The method of the debate, making use of a structured mechanism of reciprocal question-and-answer, is considered the most efficient instrument of establishing a rapport with the others, of gaining access to what others think and of establishing a consensus with regard to the resolution of a problem.

### **Conclusion**

The school is the paradigmatic cultural institution, which must develop and instill a set of values and principles with whose help, the pupil should achieve integrity, both on a personal level as well as on professional level. These values are: social values (cooperation, responsibility, equality, respect towards the others and towards the values embodied in the school, non-discrimination), individual values (honesty, dignity, respect for truth, respect towards oneself), cultural values (tolerance, the

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preparations that facilitate understanding take, as well as to what extent will the teacher's original project be realized." Diaconu, "Însemnări cu privire la prelegere și dialog", 49.

acceptance of cultural diversity) and process-values (adaptability, critical spirit, discernment, independence, the capacity to judge objectively, decision-making, creativity, academic excellence, creativity).

For the development of these values, modern didactics requires the teacher to adapt his style, his didactic method and the knowledge-content to be taught to the level of each class, to the pupils' capacity of comprehension and to actively involve these in the teaching process, while simultaneously making himself sure of the relevance and quality of the content to be transmitted. The teacher must involve himself in the development of meta-cognitive strategies and to create opportunities for the re-actualization of previously learned information, so that the new information be bound with that already present in the basis of the pupil's own knowledge, so that in the end to be stored at the level of long-time memory, accessible at any time in the future. Independent thinking as educational value enables the learner to reflect on the information received from the teacher, so that he will learn logically and reflexively, not mechanically, enabling him to cope in any future life situation, to make autonomous decisions, to not let himself be manipulated and influenced (by mass-media etc.). In this way, education forms the student firstly as human being (shaping his set of values and principles, in function of which the pupil will relate to those around him and to life in general), then, at university-level, as a professional in a certain field, also capable of becoming an intelligent novice, able to cope in any other field. The pupil's responsibility towards his activity of learning, his intrinsic motivation, completed by the extrinsic one provided by the parents and teachers, as well as his own passion for the one specific field and the teacher's professionalism, all these together are the influencing factors of the learner's involvement in the learning activity, both during school hours and during his individual study time.

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