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Dialogic Teaching beyond Words

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Abstract

Scientific literature has clarified relevant contributions from dialogic teaching to the improvement of results of university students, both in face-to-face, online and hybrid sessions. There is also scientific research published about the step ahead from speech acts to communicative acts, not only in the field of teaching but also and mainly in relation to consent. There is a gap about how this step ahead is already being a base for new modalities of dialogic teaching. The study we present in this article was made through communicative methodology including a participant observation of two synchronous-hybrid Master's Program seminars of adult education and a documental analysis of all the feedbacks written at the end of each session by all students. The results show that, in those two seminars, the dialogic teaching based on communicative acts, beyond speech acts, with a dialogue that includes the scientific evidence of social impact, generates a high valuation of all students about the learning they got, the transformations they can generate with it in educational projects and, in some cases, the transformations of themselves.

Keywords

Dialogic teaching, communicative acts, inner communication, higher education, hybrid teaching

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Docencia Dialógica más allá de las Palabras

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Resumen

La literatura científica ha esclarecido contribuciones relevantes de la docencia dialógica a la mejora de los resultados de los estudiantes universitarios, tanto en sesiones presenciales como en línea e híbridas. También se ha publicado investigación científica sobre el paso adelante de los actos de habla a los actos comunicativos, no sólo en el campo de la docencia, sino también y principalmente en relación con el consentimiento. Falta saber cómo este paso adelante ya está siendo la base para nuevas modalidades de enseñanza dialógica. El estudio que presentamos en este artículo se realizó a través de metodología comunicativa incluyendo una observación participante de dos seminarios magistrales síncronos-híbridos sobre educación de personas adultas y un análisis documental de todos los feedbacks escritos al final de cada sesión por todo el alumnado. Los resultados muestran que, en esos dos seminarios, la enseñanza dialógica basada en actos comunicativos, más allá de los actos de habla, con un diálogo que incluye la evidencia científica del impacto social, genera una alta valoración de todas las estudiantes sobre el aprendizaje obtenido, las transformaciones que pueden generar con él en los proyectos educativos y, en algunos casos, las transformaciones de sí mismas.

Palabras clave

Docencia dialógica, actos comunicativos, comunicación interna, enseñanza superior, enseñanza híbrida

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Scientific literature has clarified relevant contributions from dialogic teaching to the improvement of results both in face-to-face, online and hybrid sessions (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Lyle, 2008). There is also scientific research published about the step ahead from speech acts to communicative acts, not only in the field of teaching but also and mainly in relation to consent (Flecha et al., 2020). There is a gap about how this step ahead is already being a base for new modalities of dialogic teaching.

Austin (1962) elaborated a very rigorous and excellent theory of speech acts. It has been very fruitful in different disciplines and specially for the theories and practices that have a dialogic orientation. This conception fits very well in the conception of dialogue that from Socrates was reduced to its rational and verbal dimensions. Before Socrates, for instance Heraclitus had a much more open conception of the logos and of the dialogue including all dimensions of communication. Still now, most analyses of dialogic teaching are reduced to an identification of dialogue with words, with speech acts.

Current problems like the effort and debate among lawyers about indicators to differentiate sexual consent from harassment have outlined speech acts are not enough. The slogans “no means no”, “only yes is yes” are mistaken because they do not contemplate key dimensions of human relationships. As scientific literature has already clarified (Flecha et al., 2020), physical power, institutional power and interactive power force yes that are not consent; yes is not a yes when the individual is threatened with a gun.

In the dialogic society we have now, new theoretical developments are overcoming traditional ones. One of them is the step ahead from speech acts to communicative acts. Communication is made not only by words, but also with other signs like gazes, voice tones, body language. Therefore, dialogic teaching (García-Carrión et al., 2020) includes diverse signs of communication and this makes it possible to develop dialogic teaching beyond words, even where words are not the most important way. Until now, there has not been any empirical research made from this theoretical approach. The one we are presenting in this article is the first and original one.

The scientific literature clarifies that the dialogic teaching and the dialogic education and learning that have improved more and better the learning of students has been the ones that include the scientific evidence of social impact (SESI) (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023) as one of their required dimensions. There have been some versions of dialogic education which have omitted the SESI or even presented dialogue as opposed to them; those versions have been the base of the projects that have not got the best improvements of learning. In order to make successful dialogic education, scientific literature has clarified it is needed to have a clear differentiation of hoaxes from scientific evidence and scientific evidence from the subset of scientific evidence of social impact. SESI are the scientific evidence demonstrating the improvement towards achieving democratically set goals that has had any human intervention, for instance vaccines preventing COVID-19 or dialogic literary gatherings improving the learning and lives of participants.

One example between those versions of dialogic learning (Flecha & Soler, 2013) and teaching that include the SESI have been the dialogic literary gatherings. The original and successful one has two requirements: egalitarian dialogue and focus on classical books; it has demonstrated (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023) its replicability and success in all contexts. Some

versions of dialogic education have defended the use of any kind of books and even comics but in doing so they have not been able to create replicability and success. Recently, new scientific evidence (Lenhart et al., 2023) have moved some representatives of those versions to change and support the versions based on SESI.

The dialogic teaching in the analyzed two Master's Program seminars included the SESI influencing the dialogic communicative acts developed. This influence is included in the objective of this article and it is mentioned when necessary to understand the quality of the communicative acts of the students.

Materials & Methods

The objective of this article is to present an analysis of a case of dialogic teaching in which other dimensions of communicative acts were more relevant than words. The research question is: Are other dimensions of dialogue more relevant than words in a case of dialogic teaching?

The study we present in this article was made through communicative methodology (Gómez et al., 2010), the one that was pioneer in developing the criteria of social impact and co-creation that finally have become requirements within Horizon Europe and other research programs for all sciences.

The theoretical framework is the theory of dialogic society (Flecha, 2022; Flecha et al., 2022), which is the base of the communicative methodology, of the criteria of social impact and co-creation and of the concepts of communicative acts. This theory includes the contributions from diverse theories of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities and overcome their mistakes.

The five authors have read directly and profoundly the main book of this theory and have had debates about it. Although this theory has been already validated by much empirical research from diverse sciences, it is always dialogically open to new possible validations or refutations. Some authors have already directly read the books and other publications of the theories whose contributions and/or mistakes are mentioned in the theory of dialogic society.

Participants

7 students participated in both seminars and 1 more only in one of the seminars. 3 of them always participated face to face, the other 4 did sometimes face-to-face and others online. They were two seminars of a Master's Program in a university context. One contribution of the hybrid modality has been that no one of them lost one of the sessions for being ill or for other reasons. During the semesters before, most participants were used to studying in synchronous hybrid-sessions. The seminars were held in English, whereby neither the professor nor the students were native speakers in English. The professor was for one semester a visiting professor at the university. Students also already experienced other visiting professors during the semester before.

Materials

A big digital interactive screen (86'') and a MEET-Up was available in the lecture room. The digital connection was made via ZOOM. The teacher delivered the class with a basis of a PowerPoint presentation (which was different every session) that was shown in the digital interactive screen. Students took notes both in digital devices (mostly) and in paper notebooks. The class included two different cameras from where online students could see the class and the teacher: one from the interactive screen and another one that pointed to the teacher. Both cameras zoomed in and followed the person that was talking in that moment.

Students and teacher shared a virtual campus page where scientific articles of the content of each class were uploaded from the first day of the seminar. In this same virtual classroom, students engaged in the feedback that will be further explained in the following section.

Procedure

In order to analyze dialogic teaching in two Master's Program seminars of adult education, the research team made an intensive communicative observation and a documental analysis of all the feedbacks written at the end of each session by all students.

One of the co-authors made a participant observation from the teacher's planification of the seminars during month 1 until their end in month 7. This communicative observation included a) the planning of the professor during month 1; b) the elaboration of the PowerPoint presentations for each session during months 2 and 3; c) the communicative acts during all the sessions, including the hybrid ones from the month 4 to 7.

During the last 15 minutes of each session, students wrote an anonymous individual feedback; although it was totally free, it was focused mainly in their individual reflections about the content of the day. Before the next weekly session, the professor wrote his general feedback to the group and a concrete feedback to each individual. The research team has made a documentary analysis of all those writings.

The participant observation and the documentary analysis have made clear: the relevance of the dialogue beyond words of the communicative acts during each session, the importance of the inclusion of the scientific evidence of social impact and the influence of the bidirectional written feedback between students and the professor. The five co-authors have written dialogically the article through a common file in google drive and face-to-face conversations.

We have joined a new and emerging dialogic methodological innovation in social sciences. In natural sciences, the authors of the article have been the creators of the discovery they are communicating. In other words, those who create a new vaccine are those who first publish it in a scientific article. Social sciences have been dominated by the separation between those who create a new social action and those who write scientific articles about it. That is, often social scientists have written scientific articles about what others have done.

One of the ways to justify this separation has been the consideration of the distance as a requirement of objectivity. Current science has demonstrated that the objectivity comes from the evidence and arguments presented by the plurality of voices and not by distance, which has been demonstrated to include key bias like sexism and racism of the observer. The fifth signing

coauthor of this article is the professor creating the dialogic teaching without words and the second one is the professor who created the hybrid Master's Program in which it has been developed. The fourth is the participant observer and the third the one who co-created the concept with the fourth one. The first author has collaborated in the development of dialogic teaching without words.

Results

The most innovative result has been the contribution of the communicative acts beyond words to the working together of the group positively influencing the quality of the learning and the personal relations. The second relevant result is the outlining of how the quality of the communicative acts have been fostered by the inclusion of the scientific evidence of social impact (SESI). Although it is already known in the scientific literature that the dialogic education which includes the SESI in the dialogue is the one which improves the learning more, the new discovery of this research is that it also promotes the quality of the communicative acts in the classroom. This inclusion was increasingly appreciated by the students: Science is needed! (Student 1)

Evolution Towards a Dialogic Teaching Without Words

The participant observation made it clear from month 1 to 3 that the guest professor was preparing both seminars assuming there would be in each session intense debates with words, gazes, body expressions, voice tone, as it happens in the teaching and the lectures he delivers at his home university. The professor from the university where he would deliver the seminars advised him that, for cultural and institutional reasons, students hesitate to speak or debate when professors deliver their lectures. This allowed the guest professor to be prepared to concentrate himself from the first minute on the other components of communicative acts besides words: gazes and body expressions.

In the first session of Seminar A, after his presentation, as he always does, he asked the students for their opinion. One of them said with words “we cannot, because our English is not fluent”. Her smile, while speaking, and the gazes with the others made it very clear that the English language was not the only reason. The answer of the guest professor was “ah of course, I get it”, while his smile clearly communicated two things: first, that it was a dialogic communicative act of which its illocutionary effect was his smile. In fact, this communication between the students and the guest professor was through dialogic communicative acts more focused on gazes and voice tone than with words, it was a dialogic teaching beyond words. The second one is that this communication included not only the illocutionary common understanding of their expressions and intentions, but also their agreement on them. Students liked very much and learnt a lot: Also it is interesting that you observed us and that you saw how social relations can develop better teaching lessons! (Student 1)

In the first session of Seminar B, the teacher made a proposal to dedicate the last 15 minutes of each session to a written individual feedback and all the students agreed. In order to maintain

the anonymity of the comments, the teacher proposed to send them to him individually. One student made another suggestion that was considered best by the group: to use an application in order to do those feedbacks anonymously but in the virtual campus in a way that all could see the rest of the comments. All individual feedback was excellent, demonstrating not only to have profoundly understood the PowerPoint presentation and explanation of the teacher, but also an extraordinary inner speech in their minds relating each detail with the reflections about education and also their own lives.

The teacher prepared a different activity to the one planned for the second session of the seminar. Seminar B was dedicated to Dialogic Gatherings of Adults. The idea was very well received by the whole group: an online conversation with one participant in the first dialogic gathering and promoter of the more than 15,000 currently existing in different parts of the world. Students were very impressed talking through the screen to one female manual worker who joined adult education being almost illiterate and now was talking about books like *Ulysses* by James Joyce or *The Arabian Nights* relating them with the learning and the lives of participants. This impression was very present in the feedbacks they wrote to be sent to her:

To Ana: I'm very impressed how you dealt with Ulyses. And that you read it five times. Thank you very much for lively and authentic presentation. Best wishes for your future. (Student 2)

To Ana: Thank you so much for your time. To me your personal story and the dialogic gatherings are really inspiring. I would have loved to ask more questions, if we had more time together:) (Student 3)

All students were actively speaking during all the time asking more and more questions to her. Suddenly, the reason they made the first day to do not speak (their low English level) disappeared. This made it clear through words what all of them had previously very clear through their dialogue without words. It was not necessary to talk again about this. During all sessions of the two seminars they were very aware of the importance of the dialogue beyond words. This awareness made their dialogue with Ana incredibly fruitful, looking and reflecting about the non-verbal signs of their communication with Ana. This is very clear in their written feedback of all of them: Also I learned that communication should not be led only by words, but also by other physical expressions. (Student 2)

Ana Lebrón has decided to have her whole name in this publication. Being 32 years old and manual worker of a textile factory, she registered in the adult school La Verneda- Sant Martí to follow the second grade of literacy and then joined the first Dialogic Literary Gathering. The following years she simultaneously followed all grades of formal adult basic education and the literary gatherings. She has been for many years one of the promoters of the movement "1001 dialogic gatherings".

Students were impressed by the cultural and social transformation Ana made in her life thanks to the Successful Educational Action of the dialogic gatherings, especially when they knew that her case was not an exception, but what were experiencing hundreds of thousands of persons in all parts of the world. When they discovered that the dialogic gatherings were the implementation of the scientific evidence of social impact, they felt very motivated for learning the SESI, included in each of the sessions of the two seminars. This motivation has nurtured

the communicative acts oriented to learning more and more the SESI of all the topics of each session.

The most important takeaway for me today was the democratic and "unpressured", free way of dialogic gatherings. I also enjoyed the input on creating a bullying-free learning setting and a constructive atmosphere. I already thought a lot about if it is possible to try out a dialogic gathering at a future workplace. (Student 7)

Inner Communication and Impacts Beyond the Seminar

The communicative acts beyond words during the seminars generated an intense inner communication beyond the class time that came and went at any given time of the day and week. In their individual written feedbacks, students outlined the improvement in their lives generated by this inner communication: And now I go home with a lot of questions, curiosities and the desire to increase and keep active, driving away laziness and boredom from my brain. (Student 5)

The link to the inner communication was one outcome from every session:

So my learning of today is, that i need to reflect, also for myself, which theories are useful in our social impact and which are not. (Student 6)

I think today's session was indeed very important again and I wish we had more time to elaborate on the topics. (Student 7)

So the freedom and free decisions by everyone is one of the most important values in our society. So for me, the big learning of today is, that i need to stand up for my own and for those, who are no able to be such a stronge person. (Student 6)

For sexual freedom is not only necessary the verbal consenting but also freedom of physical violence as freedom of institutional and interactive power. (Student 2)

Each session started at 2:15 pm., but students were already waiting when the teacher always came at 2 pm into the classroom. As seen in the observant participant's diary, when the teacher noticed that they were outside of the classroom before 2 pm, he and the observer started to rush to be in class some minutes before 2 pm. For 15 minutes, during the preparation of the interactive screen and hybrid connection, students were talking and laughing, but the teacher could not understand any word because he did not know the language at all. Like, if we lose one sense we stimulate the others, the teacher also stimulated the understanding of the other signs of communicative acts. Day by day, students were also increasing their comprehension of what the teacher was understanding about their conversation.

When the summer arrived, students decided one day to wait in the garden outside the classroom. This occasion, the teacher was not only able to not understand the words but neither listen to them. He lost some signs of communicative acts like the voice tone and still had to stimulate much more his attempt to understand other signs. He said it was quite easy because being in the garden they laughed much more and they also used much more of their body language. The friendship among students was this day still more clear, with still more shine.

Evolution of the Teacher's Plan based on the Communicative Acts of Students

The observer participant saw how the teacher had prepared all PowerPoint presentations of each session before beginning the seminars, before knowing the students. Before each session, the communicative acts of the previous one and the written feedback always made it convenient to change the previously prepared PowerPoint presentation. What was very surprising for the observer was to see how even this PowerPoint presentation was also being modified by the teacher in relation to the dialogue beyond words during the session.

An example was during the session dedicated to the dialogic music gatherings. The previous day, the teacher had prepared slides demonstrating the motivation of common people like manual workers for Bach and other classical music. The participant observer knew what the PowerPoint presentation looked like and what he was supposed to explain. She was surprised when he started to change what he had planned beforehand and started to put examples of the music related to what he was understanding from the communicative acts without words of students.

He could see the surprised faces when he said that the dialogic literary gatherings overcome the deterministic and wrong analysis of those authors that attribute the motivation for classical music like the “Well-tempered clavier” to the people of higher socioeconomic, cultural or schooling level and exclude from this motivation those with lower levels. On the contrary, he said that the interactions change this determinism. The teacher explained that he himself liked opera because during his childhood he was living door to door with the most famous soprano of that time in his country, while most of his friends from upper class did not like it. Dialogic music gatherings are providing those kinds of interactions with classical music to those that had not had them in the past.

In order to respond to these faces of surprise, the teacher put the first prelude of the “Well-tempered Clavier” by Bach to illustrate that it was very well-known in popular culture, contrary to what Bourdieu claimed in his “Distinction”. He showed an example of a famous movie where this piece was played. Another example was the “Va, pensiero” by Verdi, which he used to illustrate how this piece was known by popular citizens, and the role it played in the unification of Italy, where followers of Garibaldi used this piece. The participant observer asked him why he had changed what he had programmed for the session; he answered: “well, I saw in their faces that they were not that interested in the beginning, and so I decided to do it this way”. The participant observer and the individual feedback coincided that it was a highly remembered class by students.

Communicative Acts in a Hybrid Setting

The participant observer included the analysis of both communicative acts in those hybrid seminars, face-to-face and online. The used technology allowed online and face-to-face attendants to look at each other and at the teacher directly, even with more details in their faces. Besides they were larger in the screen than in presence, to look very directly at the face of one student being close to her frequently results violent, but it is not looking at her through the screen. This difference was going on unconsciously for students, when they were face-to-face

in the classroom and when they were online. One day, the teacher, after looking at the face of one student on the screen very close to her, he moved slowly in the direction of one student in presence and, before being so close, the students started to laugh and to move their heads nodding to communicate without words that they made conscious what until this moment was unconscious.

The two cameras moved following the image of those who were speaking at each moment. Online attendants could see all body expressions of their classmates, although it was not the same in the other way around. When students were online, they did not care about having their image very large, but they did not like when being in the classroom the camera projected the image of their face very large on the screen. The communicative acts without words in those moments made it very clear that when they were online they did not see such large faces on the screen, but they could see them when they were in the classroom.

Impact of Learning the Theory of Communicative Acts

Besides the official programme of the two seminars, students appreciated very much their learning about the communicative acts and their importance for all dimensions of their lives:

So i need to be very sensible for those kind of communication, because there a[re] some messages which can't be transported by words. (Student 6)

Thanks for your interesting lessons- there are so many things I will take with me for my job and personally (Student 1)

All in all, I think I will have a few takeaways from this lesson, not only for my professional life but for my personal life as well. (Student 3)

Thank you for the topic, you said it is still not solved and that we still know very little about it, but with these kinds of sessions we become more aware and can develop this more in our daily life. (Student 4)

According to the participant observation, in the last communication of the last session, Student 1 put a serious face and had a dialogue with the teacher:

Student 1 (with a sad face): It is very sad that this seminar is finished

Teacher (with a smile): Well, what would be sad is if we were not sad at all, this would mean that we do not care. We have plenty of time and you can write to me by my university email whenever you want.

All students nodding their heads yes.

Student 1 (laughing and smiling): In the evaluation of the class, I have written that they have to bring you more.

Discussion

The analysis of dialogic teaching beyond words (Flecha et al., 2009) contributes not only to the improvement of the educational practice, but also of the educational theory. Habermas understood wrongly the meaning of illocutionary in Austin's works. Habermas (Soler &

Flecha, 2010) thought illocutionary meant not only a common understanding but also a common agreement, but Austin's theory of speech acts does not confuse understanding with agreement, illocutionary includes only understanding, not necessarily agreement. There are many communicative acts with common understanding but without agreement. For example, this happens if the smile of the student is understood by her peers and by the teacher, but he does not agree and forces the students to talk; in this case, we would not have a dialogic communicative act but a power communicative act.

The participant observer could clearly notice how the teacher looked in a more fixed way to the faces of students when they were online than in face-to-face. This issue was a matter of dialogue within the group. If the teacher looked fixedly at the face of a student in presence, she could be uncomfortable and maybe thinking something was wrong; even being a male teacher and the student female, her insecurity could be stronger. In this conversation without words, students agreed it was not the same when they were online.

Analyses of dialogic teaching beyond words are able to join the contributions that the studies of communicative acts are making to social theories going much further than the already existing ones in the analysis of human communication and society. From different disciplines, it has demonstrated that dialogue made us humans and it is day by day making and transforming individuals and societies. Since we wake up every morning, we start making communicative acts, face-to-face and through the internet; lessons are made through all dimensions of communicative acts, to improve their quality it is needed scientific analysis about how they are made and how they can be enhanced.

Conclusion

Although the impacts of dialogic teaching are already known by the international scientific community, it is the first time to our knowledge that the communicative acts in this setting are analyzed. This article shows the impacts of dialogic teaching in a setting where words were not the main communication tool. Therefore, we conclude that, in this setting, the combination of both scientific evidence of social impact and dialogic teaching were the key; that is, that dialogic teaching does not necessarily mean to have spoken dialogues in order to happen.

Future research should analyze the impact on students' academic careers with dialogic teaching without words, as well as its impact on other educational context (in all ages).

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