

***DIALOGICAL EDUCATION IN A TIME OF GLOBALIZATION:  
EXPANSION, LOCALIZATION, AND CONNECTION  
(COMMENT ON FECHO)***

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**ABSTRACT.** In response to Fecho's work a case is made for dialogue in the classroom. It is argued that dialogue can bridge contradictions that we are faced with as a result of the globalization process. It is increasingly important that education takes this message to heart and aims to raise citizens; it is essential that young people learn to become attuned to the beauty and aesthetics inherent in dialogue and are not merely brought up to focus on succeeding on the labour market or to see culture as another consumer product. The review discusses what dialogue is and how a dialogical space is created by taking on myriad I- and we-positions and switching between them – even playfully. Finally dialogue is also about developing one's talent, imagining optimistic possible futures, and addressing conflicts by getting to know others viewpoints; dialogue is both clarifying and creative and essential to the development of individuals and the collective in a civilized society.

**KEYWORDS:** dialogical education, globalization, play

Fecho has written a stimulating and inspiring article about the meaning of dialogue and the concept of dialogue in the classroom, where students and the teacher are faced with the consequences of globalization. The situation, in which Ian the teacher and the student Marisol find themselves, is typical of the tensions and uncertainties and dilemmas with which we are confronted as a result of globalization. Fecho's use of Bakhtin's term 'heteroglossia' very effectively clarifies the diverse verbal-moral responses of the government and of Ian in dealing with the tensions: impersonal restrictive legislation versus a sense of personal involvement – relating to someone with a face, name and background. It makes clear that both Ian as well as Marisol are confronted with an existential choice: adjust to the government policies and what 'they' believe about the rights and opportunities of illegal citizens or follow the voice of one's own conscience and run the risk of sanctions and active resistance from the authorities. Fecho argues convincingly that the choice to not adjust is made possible as a result of the dialogical conditions created by Ian for this in the classroom. As a result, students

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such as Marisol feel seen as individuals and are challenged to face their complex situation, talk about it and understand it. In addition the dialogical atmosphere of the classroom stimulates the exploration of one's own talents, the development of those and the development of a future vision. Last but not least political competency is brought into the dialogical class. This connects seamlessly with Martha Nussbaum's (2010) plea in her book "Not for profit" to have education focus on raising world citizens.

In my response, I will try to make clear that dialogical education has more to offer than the preparation or the creation of a more resilient and responsible way of dealing with the complexity, dynamic and the insecurity of the globalization process. First I will explore in more detail the meaning of the terms dialogue and dialogical. Following that I will present learning possibilities that are characteristic of dialogical education. I will focus on the importance of this for finding a fitting response to the challenges that globalization confronts us with. After that I will argue that dialogue, making meaning and story, belong in the domain of culture and are primarily connected to the classical values of beauty. Finally I will, using the ideas of Kant, shine light on a particularly valuable possibility of dialogical education: bridging the gap between theory and practice.

### **Dialogical education: creative play in the dialogical space with experience, symbols and meaning**

In a dialogue people create conceptual space in which they can take in any number of positions with regards to a wide variety of topics. For instance one can take in a liberal position with regards to poverty reduction, while someone else takes a socialistic view, and another comes from a neutral stance and doesn't have a particular view on the topic. From those positions we exchange experiences and meanings. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we don't. We can change position, or switch from one position to another. In our dialogues we focus on topics that capture our attention and trigger our emotions; in other words, topics that are important to us (Frijda, 1989). We feel something is at stake; it's exciting. We do not only exchange experiences and opinions, we develop opinions and create stories. Taking on and switching positions, asking and answering, defending and calling into question, all of this, leads to clarifying the topics of conversation and clarifying the diversity of positions – in other words, it results in a meaning gain. As we engage in dialogue, we also discover that the myriad of positions exist *because* of one another and that corresponding view points and meanings are relative. In the dialogue – moving between the different, often contradictory positions – we do not only explore salient topics, learn about others and their views, but discover how differentiated and changeable we are. An individual can also create his own dialogical space, in which based on experience with "one's self", one can differentiate between different positions and connect them with one another via a

dialogue. How can I, the silent one, and I, the animated talker, relate to one another? How does my masculine side, and my recently discovered feminine side, relate to one another? By differentiating between various parts of myself and accepting and bringing those parts into a dialogue with one another, I can explore myself and get to know myself better. In this dialogical exchange with myself, I create space for everything that arises from my experience. Here, I make use of the implied principle of the ‘inner truth’, the truth perceived by me (Taylor, 1994) and therefore I need not suppress beforehand any part of my experiences on moral or other grounds in the process of self-reflection and interpretation. Moreover, I avoid dialogue as the pitfall of logic, which dictates that I cannot be two things at once, for instance only silent or only an eager talker. The dialogical-narrative exchange with experience does in fact offer the space for two contradictory aspects to co-exist (Hermans, 1993) and helps the individual to escape the boredom, suppression and stagnation, that are characteristic of the otherwise one-sidedness. In this way the so-called dialogical self can exist and grow by making use of the possibility of reflecting on life experiences that feel important, to name them, to bring them into dialogue with one another, to clarify them and to transform them into a growing understanding and an authentic life story. In this way, I can determine my identity in a narrative way and a window of opportunity opens regarding the direction – one in which I can search for a suitable societal role.

The kinship between the development of the dialogical self and the process described by Jung as ‘individuation’ is poignant. Jung (1985) describes the one-sided development to the personality, determined by the ruling moral of logic, as someone who has in the process of socialization become identified with the societal mask, or persona. The personality can end up in crisis when the immoral or non-logical parts of the self, for which there was no space in the persona, penetrate into consciousness. Jung describes how the individual is then confronted with his/her shadow and is faced with the challenge of becoming acquainted with the shadow and to integrate it into one’s consciousness. If that is successful then the so-called ‘individuation’ process can begin, whereby the feminine side of the man (the anima) and the masculine side of the woman (the animus) can be integrated into one’s consciousness. In the individuation process, the original childlike, *Puer Aeternis*, can also become conscious. If during one’s upbringing or education the development of the dialogical self can be stimulated and supported, then the individuation process can begin much earlier, and an individual need not stagnate behind a societal mask and need not wait for a mid-life crisis to become again, as in childhood, someone who can present themselves in societal exchanges in an authentic and flexible manner.

It seems clear to me that dialogue is innately suited to exploring and formulating viewpoints about all that we perceive as urgent but also things that are unclear with regards to the globalization process. Hermans, from whom I borrow the above descriptions of dialogue, writes, “The dialogue is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship

in which the participants move between different I- and we-positions. It is here that a field of tension arises that can be characterised as a 'dialogical space' in which verbal and non-verbal exchanges can take place. Within that tension, and with acknowledgement of each other's alternativeness (differences), participants get the opportunity to contribute to the exchange based on the experiences and perspectives that are characteristic of those particular positions. This occurs in a way in which exchanges lead to an expansion and deepening of one another's positions. The resulting dialogical space offers optimal ground for the coming into being of affective relationships, innovative insights and relevant learning processes" (Hermans, 2012; see also Hermans & Kempen, 1993). In this way students can develop their own insights and viewpoints regarding current issues; insights and viewpoints that have already been tested in external and internal dialogues and of which students have been able to see the relativity. This gives them an important part of the flexible mental equipment that they need to deal well with all the changes, paradoxes and uncertainties that globalization entails.

Dialogue also offers another important learning opportunity, that should not go unmentioned here, namely: learning to deal with conflict. In conflicts, parties have the tendency to solidify their own positions, to make absolute the rightness of their views and to close down more and more with regards to the viewpoints, interests and rights of others. Discussing conflicts in a dialogue – in which the participants learn, know and defend the position of both one and the other party – can help enormously in bridging the contradictions and finding workable compromises. The dialogue can stimulate a dialectical process; in the tension between thesis and anti-thesis a synthesis can be looked for and discovered. Students can experience that the "insolubility" of conflicts is often an illusion and has to do with misunderstood self-interest and the corresponding unwillingness to engage in the dialogue. The loss of old certainties as part of the globalisation process is the source of conflicts that students are continually faced with both at home and in the media. In the dialogue at school they can learn how to deal with these things in a realistic and fruitful way, so that they need not allow themselves to be dragged along by particular parties in the murkiness of global political tensions.

In dealing with serious conflicts another last, important characteristic of the dialogue becomes apparent, that is: the possibility to breakthrough a hopeless deadlock and create a hopeful perspective for the future. In dialogue, we can not only exchange thoughts about the past and the present, but we can also use our imagination to envision a future. Negative, sombre-like images of the future, or hopeful visions. Moreover, we can focus on the likelihood of the latter being realized.

**The dialogue as playful activity in the domain of culture, aimed at beauty**

The dialogical involvement with life experiences is characterized by subjectivity/ intersubjectivity, reflexivity and open, creative meaning making with regards to what feels important in the flow of life experience. It is a hermeneutical activity, that leads to stories, and eventually to a larger collective story of cultural history, in which everyone, consciously or unconsciously contributes something. It is in this way that we orientate ourselves in time and space and give meaning to our experiences. Characteristic of dialogical processing of life experiences is that the dialogue is situated in the domain of culture. The historian Huizinga (1952) described the culture as a game and the playing human – *Homo Ludens* – as the carrier and creator of culture. In a dialogue, it is noticeable how playfully the process of meaning making takes place. It is free and exciting. The participants move within the conceptual space that is contained by their own experiences. The dialogue requires the most of their creativity and their feelings of beauty and truth. In the languages with which they interpret and communicate, the rules of the game are contained. In a real game, there has to be something to win or lose. In dialogue it is always about meaning-gain. The more competent the participants, the greater the gain. By extension, I think it is fair to say that the dialogical self is a manifestation of the *Homo Ludens*, the playing human.

In his study of the meaning of play, Huizinga cites Plato whom he much admires, “One has to be serious about the earnestness and it is God (the ideas/the mind, G.W.) who is worthy of such earnestness while man is made as God’s toy, and that is the best of him. That’s why every man and woman should go through life playing the best game they can, quite the opposite of what they are doing now. (...) As one plays, one must live in order to please the gods and to defend against the enemy and to win the battle.” Huizinga concludes, “In this platonic identification of play and holiness, what is holy is not put down, by calling it a game, but the game exalted, by applying this meaning to the highest levels of the spirit.” Play is seen as a thing of beauty, something that can bridge contradictions instead of creating conflicts and something holy, as it relates to making something whole instead of allowing it to remain scattered in pieces. In this way ‘the game’ is tied to classical values of beauty and to something aesthetic or artful. In the conversation about dialogue – as we move back and forth between myriad I- and we-positions – we have continually encountered its ability to bridge contradictions. In other words, the dialogue belongs to the domain of culture, the game and the aesthetic.

About ten years ago, the German philosopher Safranski (2003) wrote a brief review of globalization with the poignant title, “How much globalization can a person take?” In the end he sought his answer to that question in the 19<sup>th</sup> century German ‘Bildungsideal’ and in the thoughts of Schiller, who aimed to realize this development ideal through the “aesthetic development of the human being”, connecting with the

human motivation to play. The idea of culture-aesthetic development through cultivating the human urge to play with meanings, is therefore not new but was, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, limited to the elite few.

It is precisely the process of globalisation that requires education to take responsibility for the large-scale development of the feeling of beauty and the related playful potential of students. This is no easy task now that education is increasingly focused on the labour market while the cultural sector is also under increasing pressure to consider what it makes as saleable and to bring “cultural products” to market. Still, it is now of utmost importance that students in educational institutions learn to play with culture. If they do so, they can later reach a level of civilized action, precisely in the face of the increasing pressing of globalization, that allows them to deal with cultural diversity and conflicts in a way that is humane, flexible, creative, and constructive. Without these qualities, society will decline into chaos and globalization will lead to nihilism, disorientation and barbarism.

**Dialogical education as the lacking, but indispensable, link  
between theory and practice**

Finding workable connections between theory on the one hand and practice and skills on the other is an age-old problem, not only in education but also in my field of work (psychology). On the one side, highly specialized academic research is done with its back turned to practice, with apparently little to offer the working psychologist, who is faced with complex problems on a daily basis. On the other side, there is a professional who no longer grasps the theoretical developments and instead satisfies him/herself with his colleagues in the field and their shared vision about the problems of clients and the corresponding methodologies to use in addressing them. The researchers are interested in the universal truth about experience and behaviour, the professionals are interested in good solutions for concrete, partly unique, experience-based and behavioural issues. Here too, dialogical education can offer some solace. Kant in his “Critique of Judgement” already pointed out that judgement – in the domain of art or aesthetics – was the only link between theory and practice (Storig, 1972). Beauty as a unique connection between what is true and good. In dialogical education, by connecting theory and practice (or theorist and practitioner) respectively to I and we-positions, students can learn to know and use workable connections between theory and practice. In this way, an age-old problem can be solved and educational benefits noticeably increased.

Dialogical education offers the possibility to transform the pressure and chaos caused by the globalization process into a higher level of competence- and civilization and to increase the benefits of theoretical and practical education.

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