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**Word in Education: Theory and Practice**

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## **Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education**

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## Editorial

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The present volume of the *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education* (No. 19) is devoted to the issue of appropriate language use – an issue which has fascinated both scholars and non-academics since the very beginnings of the conscious application of verbal communication. In the essays collected in Issue 19, the focus has been placed on several theoretical and practical issues which are subsumed under three major sections covering theoretical, pedagogical, and miscellaneous interests.

Issue 19 of the *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education* is titled “Word in Education: Theory and Practice.” The opening words of the title are evocative since they also served as the name of an international conference, “Word in Education: Good Word, Bad Word, No Word,” which was co-organized by Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow and Abat Oliba CEU University in Barcelona. Thus, they are meant to activate and evoke certain ideas that were brought up during the conference. The subtitle, “Theory and Practice,” indicates two manners in which the issue of proper language use may be approached, namely, as a subject of scholarly examination and as a means of interpersonal communication in a classroom setting.

The first section of Issue 19, Thematic Articles, theorizes language as being applied in both formal and informal educational contexts. Thematic papers examine language and communication in the private context – within the nuclear family – and in the public sphere, that is, in religious and political discourse. The section opens with Giuseppina D’Addelfio and Maria Vinciguerra’s investigation of the manner in which significant words shape the discourse of contemporary family education. Against the phenomenological research of Husserl and Ricouer, D’Addelfio and Vinciguerra analyze intergenerational dialogues performed in the family, which allows them to isolate three major words

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that, they argue, guarantee successful communication: emotion(ality), truth, and recognition. By contrast, the two subsequent thematic papers may be situated on the opposite end of the theoretical axis, as they explore language use in larger social groups and in formal situations: while María Ángeles Martín-del Pozo focuses on “Words to Encourage Evangelization,” Sylvia Janina Wojciechowska directs the readers’ attention to “Politics and the Inadequacy of Words.” Both authors concentrate on an efficient linguistic communication in which an individual speaker means to succeed in the formation of a certain response in a community. Applied in different contexts and for various purposes, the stylistic approach in both articles becomes a subject of close study in the search for the Aristotelian markers of a speech with pathos, that is, a memorable one. The thematic section closes with an elaboration on yet another aspect that preconditions efficiency in education, which, quite surprisingly, regards non-verbal communication: as Maria Szymańska pointedly argues, silence is meaningful “in Mastering Reflective Skills.” The scholar argues for an appreciative and motivated approach towards silence in the classroom setting, which equates to – and indeed impacts on – verbal instruction.

Section Two, Reflections on Teaching Practice, covers a number of practical approaches to language and communication in institutional instruction. It opens with Marta Blanco Navarro’s exploration of the nature of “the teacher/student relationship.” Navarro’s approach involves the field of applied linguistics in the context of school education. Here, language is examined as a means of interaction between the Self and the Other; hence, a substantial part of the analysis is formed by ontological issues. The next article in the section, “Teacher’s Collective Efficacy,” elaborates on the empirical linguistic evidence for classroom communication. Yunus Adebunmi Fasasi and Mustapha Adam Ishola focus on students’ and teachers’ performance in Nigerian secondary schools. Based on a TCEQ questionnaire, the authors outline the ways teachers in northern Nigerian might improve on their teaching methods in order to positively influence students’ performance. A similar, region-oriented approach has been adopted in “A Comparative Research Study Conducted in Slovakia” by

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Erika Novotná. Novotná's empirical stance addresses the topical issue of modern technology in the classroom and it skillfully expounds on the reasons for a considerable deterioration in the critical thinking capacity of iGeneration students, in comparison to millenials. The subsequent paper also examines the interface between technology and school instruction; in this case, however, Diego Rodríguez-Ponga Albalá investigates the "Application of Video Games in Education" in view of potentially improving teaching in history classes.

Section Three, Miscellaneous Articles, includes paper titled "Words and Silence in Job Mentoring" authored by Joaquín Solana-Oliver and Carmen Ruiz-Viñals. The article examines the intersection of verbal and non-verbal communication in the professional setting.

The editorial team are proud to present this selection of articles, which comprises an inspiring body of theoretical inquiries and research materials. We are quite certain that the reading of Issue 19 will not only provide you with empirical data, but will also establish a number of potential issues to address and directions to follow in a further investigation of the significance of verbal and non-verbal communication in institutional and private instruction.

Sylwia Janina Wojciechowska



# Thematic Articles

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## Family Relationships, Dialogue, and Philosophy for Children: Words for Contemporary Education<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The paper deals with the importance of words and dialogue in family education. In the first part, some evidence of an action research is presented – shaped in a hermeneutic phenomenological framework and thanks to the Philosophy for Children method and materials. Then some key words are pointed out, meant as formative goals for parents' educational support, so as to highlight the importance of dialogue among generations and, mainly, of the ethical responsibility of parents in education.

*Keywords:* hermeneutic phenomenology, dialogue, emotions, recognition, responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is the product of both authors' work. However, Giuseppina D'Addelfio is specifically responsible for Paragraphs On the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Paradigm and Adult Education and Key Words for Contemporary Family Education and Maria Vinciguerra for Paragraphs An Action-Research Through Philosophy for Children and Comparing Dialogues.

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## Introduction

In 1999, Asha Phillips published the book *Saying No: Why It's Important for You and Your Child*, which would soon become a bestseller and thus translated into several languages. Other, similar books were then published in the same vein. This trend seems to have met an increasingly widespread need among contemporary parents: namely, to get answers and handbooks to accomplish the task of *raising a child*; for centuries, this was considered a fairly simple and obvious practice, whereas today the parenting *functions* are perceived as a challenging, demanding, and uncertain undertaking not only in children's adolescence (as it was for previous generations of parents), but starting even in their early childhood. On the other hand, one might investigate the relationship between such a perception and Gauchet's idea of *Child of Desire*, easily transformed into a *Child King* (2004). However, the early discontinuation in the dialogue between generations is a fact – hence the relevance of parents' current, genuine formative need.

Precisely considering this context, the paper presents some aspects of a wider action-research with a specific focus on the formative pathways for parents designed to explore family lived experience and, therefore, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the *essential profiles* of the educative relationships within the family as well as improvement in the communicative competences between generations. The framework of this empirical research and the subsequent theoretical insights on this specific adult education experience – as outlined in Section 1 – is the research paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology. Then, some evidence which emerged thanks to the action-research is reported in Sections 2 and 3. Finally, some key words, meant as formative goals for parents' educational support are highlighted and discussed in Section 4.

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## On the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Paradigm and Adult Education

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, there has been an increasing interest in phenomenology as a powerful research methodology in order to investigate several aspects of human life. Indeed, phenomenology has extended its range to fields such as psychology, psychiatry, sociology, nursing, healthcare, and – significantly – education.

As is well known, phenomenology is a widespread philosophical movement (Spiegelberg, 1971; Moran & Parker, 2015) which started with Edmund Husserl's works. The phenomenological approach can be meant as a specific philosophical and educative approach, also described as a "pedagogy of attention" (Bellingreri, 2011). Actually, all phenomenologists, however different they were and may be, share a style of thinking that implies both a serious consideration of what appears and a commitment to *return to the things themselves*, thereby bringing to the fore its essential profiles. In the Husserlian perspective, this commitment implies, first and foremost, an *epochè* – i.e., a suspension or "bracketing" of our "natural attitude" or habitual adhesion to the world – as well as a reconsideration of what is usually taken for granted (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). This is the reason why phenomenology can also be considered "a way to educate our vision, to define our posture, and to broaden the way we look at the world" (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010, p. 10).

These educational aims particularly fit the scope of adult education, as stressed by several studies. For example, in the third edition of their famous text on the philosophical foundation of adult education, Elias and Merriam (2005) included phenomenology in the humanistic frameworks, insofar as this approach strongly evaluates personal agency, singularity, and dignity. Namely, they recalled Stanage's attempts to use phenomenology "to lead new programs for adult learners, adult educators, and new paradigm for research" (1987, p. 304). Actually, Stanage had provided a view on Husserl's thought as a possible approach involving

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systematic investigation of the performative enactments of, and the systematic investigation of, the essential structures of the phenomena constituting adult education of person. These phenomena most specifically are of the deliberative and liberative action of conscientizing and responsible persons whereby they become transformed and empowered with vital motive for living (1987, p. 304).

More recently, in an insightful paper comparing transformative learning theories and continental theories of *Bildung* in adulthood, Brinkmann introduced the Husserlian phenomenology as a *philosophy of human experience*:

focusing on experience, phenomenology takes into account that the phenomena of the life world are prior to their scientific conceptualization and methodization. To describe experience, phenomenological research employs Husserl's genetic analysis of intentionality ... [and] examines the genesis and the constitution of sense or, in other words, the ability of the self (in relation to the world) to experience, perceive, feel, or think something *as something*. (2015, p. 76)

Moreover, in developing his presentation of phenomenology for adult education, Brinkmann has drawn an interesting comparison between Husserl's writing and an "almost forgot book: Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*" (2015, p. 74), insofar as the latter contains a sort of theory of education where the practices of self-care, self-guidance, and self-formation are combined; however, the prominent role of the educational guide is stressed as well.

What has been said so far helps us to understand phenomenology as offering specific and powerful tools – not only epistemological and methodological tools, but ontological and anthropological ones as well – for attentive, respectful, and insightful educational studies, in particular for adults and, therefore, also for parents.

This is particularly the case when hermeneutics is *grafted* onto phenomenology, as in Paul Ricoeur (1986; see Bloundel, 2010), whose approach can be considered a further development of Husserl's teaching in terms of being more focused on the study of lived experience and of how human beings seek to understand and give meaning to the world in which they live. In general, contemporary hermeneutics can be also included in the humanistic orientation of adult education, insofar as the perspective of hermeneutics orbits around the idea of "worldwide construction" – the ongoing development "of understanding of the world, of other, of self, and of understanding itself" (MacKenzie, 1991, p. viii), which is always irreducibly personal (see also: Welton, 1995).

At the same time, phenomenology and hermeneutics focus on the idea of a *life-world* – and each family can be considered such a word. Indeed, phenomenology and hermeneutics allow us to acknowledge that "we live in a world of mutually affecting entities where our actions have an effect on those with whom we come into contact, and conversely, where we are also affected by their actions" (Agrey, 2014, p. 396). Taking this research approach does not only mean studying this mutual effect, but also

includes an enactment of a particular kind of responsibility for oneself as an integral part of the interpretation of other things and people. This allows for the opportunity of self-understanding to change, as one's own interpretations are shown to need revision. (Agrey, 2014, p. 396)

In particular, Ricoeur argued for the necessity of a never-ending elucidation of meanings, meant as interpretation and re-interpretation. Therefore, such a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm provides a way of inquiring into human experience and meaning-making, since it offers a specific account of the importance of human words as well as the importance of reflecting on them. Moreover, the very nature of such reflexivity implies that the concrete contexts and belongings in which it is always embodied are viewed with a fresh and closer look.

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Ricoeur deals with the role of symbolising signification and various uses of language, thereby highlighting the way narrative leads us to the question of personal identity, precisely meant as a narrative identity. Namely, the text is considered as a structured work as well as a world that can mediate self-understanding, insofar as the ultimate goal of reading a text is not understanding it but, indeed, *understanding oneself in front of the text*, in a dialogue with others. Hence, our authentic *self* is the result of the *gift* that comes from interpersonal relationships. Actually, in *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur, 1992) and elsewhere (Suazo, 2000), Ricoeur pinpoints the ethical nature of personhood and its intimate relation to alterity, thus allowing for a consideration of family relationships from a particular pedagogical perspective. In general, this approach highlights the ontologically fundamental role of intersubjectivity in human life, whereby ethical attitudes related in their lines of thought, such as dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition (Ricoeur, 2004), emerge.

To conclude this section and introduce the presentation of our action-research, it is worth highlighting that on many occasions hermeneutic phenomenology accounts for the tools for research, both empirical and theoretical, in adult education. Used as an alternative to the quantitative approach to educational research, this paradigm indeed provides for a variety of fruitful possibilities (Friesen et al., 2012; Bellingeri, 2016), mainly insofar as it allows us to recognize the richness of the life-world, the human search for meaning, and the importance of a *first-person perspective* as well of the narrative and intersubjective construction of personhood.

### **An Action-Research Through Philosophy for Children**

As mentioned in the introduction, the starting point of our reflections about significant words in contemporary family education is the results of an action-research study carried out as an educational program among groups of schoolchildren and their parents (the former during the school time, the latter only if they wished to participate, mainly at other times). The general aim was to take parents through a consideration

of some key aspects of *family education* in depth and to take their children through a consideration of some key aspects of *family relationships* in depth, thus improving dialogical attitudes.

More precisely, the research was carried out in Palermo, Italy in two elementary schools and one junior high school. Most of it took place at the Jesuit Gonzaga Institute (founded in 1919 and now a member of the Foundation for Jesuit Education). The participants included 312 children (from 6 to 11 years old) and 60 parents, while the research covered a two-year period. The overall results of this study have been published elsewhere (D'Addelfio & Vinciguerra, 2020), so here we will only focus on parenting and its recurrent words.

The method used in the research was derived from *Philosophy for Children (P4C)*, i.e. Matthew Lipman's pedagogical program and curriculum aimed at using philosophy to help children develop their "critical, creative, and caring thinking" with a particular commitment to rigorous philosophical dialogue (Lipman, 1991).

Actually, Lipman wrote *philosophical dialogues* (which he called "novels"), where reasoning, questioning, and conceptual exploration played a key role in the lives of a group of children and their friends, teachers, and parents. As is well-known, P4C curriculum and methodology are explicitly grounded in social constructivist learning theories (Santi & Oliveira, 2013). These theories point to social interaction, and thus, to dialogue as a mechanism for the internalization of new and more complex ways of thinking, reflecting, and speaking. However, the above-mentioned ontological and anthropological presupposition of the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm can be detected as well: the importance of understanding, the powerful role of narrative – that is, of words and dialogue – the prominence of personal lived experience and of others' experience, the responsibility for the common lifeworld, and the commitment to change one's own interpretations when the intersubjective encounters reveal that they need to be revisited.

All these theoretical insights can be detected in both the practice of classroom dialogue and in the different dialogic episodes occurring in the curriculum novels. Many of these stories are set in familiar spaces and

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feature dialogues between parents and children and, in our research, we worked on precisely episodes of this type and used the following novels: *The Doll Hospital*, *Elfie*, *Kio & Gus*, and *Pixie*. After reading such novels within their “community of inquiry,” the children and parents would raise questions and examine suggestions for answers. Thus, in our action-research, the use of Lipman’s method and materials was extended to parental education. In fact, the P4C is also used in adult education contexts, where it is also called “Philosophy for Community” and/or is realized as “Philosophy Cafés” – and sometimes precisely for parental education (Rodrigo et al., 2010; Tattarletti, 2014).

Through the P4C method, parents have the opportunity to start a common reflection and questioning within a small group about parenting and to share their educational experiences. In other words, P4C can be considered a powerful educational setting – a genuinely Socratic as well as Deweyan one – providing not only children but also adults with a space to question and to explore the impact that their questioning and dialogue have in their lives (Mendoca & Costa-Carvalho, 2019). This methodology particularly discloses dialogues and, therein, words used as fundamental educational tools. That is why the P4C literature has provided educators with a great number of strategies and tools for maintaining dialogue and questioning, thus fostering reflective thinking in a community of inquiry.

P4C “takes questions seriously and offers multiple points of entry for deconstructing the nature of the question” (Turgeon, 2015, p. 284). Indeed, questions are a central part of thinking and inquiring in a P4C session with children. More specifically, in each session two moments for questions can be detected: first, the community sets the agenda after reading an episode of the philosophical novel; then, the specific key question the entire session will revolve around is chosen. In Lipman’s approach, the first questions are posed by an individual questioner, or better by a couple or a small group of participants; the facilitator will make this clear, writing the name of the participants who formulated the question after it (on a board or flipchart), as to compose the *agenda*. It provides the group with a cognitive map of its own interests and needs (Lipman, 1997). Once all questions have been collected, the community of inquiry

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is invited to reflect on them and to identify some possible links, so as to give the participants as many tools as possible to decide together which key questions to select for inquiry. That is, the agenda makes visible the questions and their possible similarity and works as a springboard that prompts the community to formulate further questions.

A P4C session remains open-ended, as it often happens in family life and as always envisaged in the hermeneutic inquiry. In fact, hermeneutics places a greater value on the genuine question than the resulting answers or solutions (Smits, 2001). Here, another educative approach that is crucial for our time can be disclosed.

### **Comparing Dialogues**

We held six inquiry sessions, amounting to three per group of children (15/20 participants each) and three philosophy sessions per group of parents (15/20 participants each). All of the sessions began with a warm-up activity. The parents and children worked with the same materials. At the end of each year, meeting days were organized between parents and children to consider together the work they had done, to view the materials produced by parent groups, and to compare them with those of their children.

For the purpose of the present paper, some examples of dialogues which compared the children's and parents' words are worth noting. For example, when the key question was "What am I supposed to learn?", the children said "to be autonomous and share with others," while the parents said "to distinguish requests for cuddles from tantrums." Another example may orbit around "Needs and educational needs." In answer to this section, the children said "security, belonging, confirmation, truth" (all supposed to be provided by parents), but the parents said "children need to be understood and to have room to express their emotions." Emotion certainly appears to be a crucial word in parents' account of their role, insofar as the care of emotions is frequently recalled to describe an authentic and genuine educational relationship.

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Also, when it came to the significance and importance of the word “truth” in family educational relationships, an interesting aspect emerged: the children said that they were searching for truth through their parents without actually getting it, since the latter do not usually tell them the truth – in their opinion, out of fear of hurting them. For parents, on the other hand, the truth sounds risky insofar as it is meant as subjective and relative.

Finally, the perspectives about the word “rules” is worth noticing. The younger children think that rules are important and necessary; in particular, the 11-year-old children thought that rules “can free us.” However, parents think that rules are important for raising a child, although today setting and enforcing them seems to be very difficult because – to quote their own words – “rules represent a limit to freedom.”

### **Key Words for Contemporary Family Education**

In summary, considering the key words and, therefore, the formative goals that may well be derived from our action-research and the phenomenological analysis of lived experience (Dahlberg, 2006; van Manen, 2007; Dall’Alba, 2010; Sità, 2012) that has emerged from it. To expand on the lifeworld of parents and children, we will discuss these words, by again recalling this paradigm and, in particular, some of its ontological and anthropological insights.

First of all, emotions and affective wellbeing seemed to be the paramount concern of the parents. We have to recognize that this approach, as one may derive from the parents’ words on how to meet their children’s needs, mirrors the “cult of emotion” (Lacroix, 2001) which is typical of our times and which appears from a phenomenological perspective to be a form of “psychologism” (Bruzzone, 2012). With regard to this, we must stress that emotion is to be considered a crucial word in education, insofar as emotion and affective experiences do provide useful information. Therefore, they must be listened to and considered in familial relationships.

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However, as highlighted in the phenomenological paradigm, emotions as such are only the surface, since the “structure of human person” – in Edith Stein’s words – is made up of different, interrelated levels: body, soul, and spirit.

In fact, emotions mainly act at the body level, so, for the sake of a real *personal* life, for the sake of education, over-emphasizing emotions should also be revisited in view of the other levels involved. Moreover, in order to avoid any reductive approach to emotions, they should be considered in light of their intentional structure, thereby associating intentional states with specific contents (and they correlate particularly with values and ethical experience; Husserl, 2004; von Hildebrand, 1916, 1922, 1965; Lenoci, 1992; Melle, 2002; Crosby, 2002). In this perspective, the emotional responses can be adequate or inadequate and *desire* is to be understood not as a merely dispositional term, but also and equally as a term for something consciously felt (Montague, 2018) and which can therefore be educated.

The second key word identified in the research is “truth,” which is a need for children but an issue for parents, whose approach again mirrors our times and, in particular, the moral relativism and skepticism that prevails. However, if such skepticism were fully practiced, how should a person be educated? How can one tell them that one thing is better for them than something else, and that another thing is definitely not good for them?

At this stage, therefore, by recalling Ricouer, we might add a third key word – “recognition” – meant in two ways: as a passive need (to be recognized as a person, which includes the acceptance of emotions) and as an active one (to recognize a meaning beyond the subjective, thus engaging in the search for truth). Actually, on closer examination – which a phenomenological approach makes possible – each of us is revealed to be a person always needing *to be recognized* as well as *to recognize* – the former being easily acknowledged today in the need of the care of the affective sphere of our lives, the latter including the human need to have limits and rules and to learn meanings, in order to live as a person in communities with other persons.

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To move to our conclusion, a consequence that may be derived from what was stated above is that many contemporary parents need to be guided through the understanding that, in education, emotions are not enough. Specifically, they need to be educated to understand that *being a parent* cannot be meant in terms of functions, but must be conceived of and realized as a personal responsibility.

As a result, the last key word – and, in our perspective, the most important one in family education – is “responsibility,” meant on the one hand as the ethical effort to understand the other’s perspective and needs and to revisit previous ideas and habits in order to change them if necessary, and on the other hand to discern whether and how to ask the other to change, to help them improve. Thus, the profile of a specific responsibility is to welcome, support, and guide. This responsibility can be finally meant as the moral capacity and the choice of parents to answer the twofold need for recognition of their son/daughter and of each son/daughter in their singularity and personal dignity.

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## Words to Encourage Evangelization: A Comparison of Lexical Frequencies in the Writings of Pope Francis and Fr. Tomás Morales, SJ

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### **Abstract**

Studying language through naturally-occurring data is easily feasible nowadays thanks to the use of concordancers. Using the software package AntConc by Laurence Anthony, the author approaches the linguistic style of Pope Francis in four of his apostolic exhortations. His lexical frequencies are compared to those of Venerable Fr. Tomás Morales, a Spanish Jesuit (1908–1994) who is considered a prophet of our time for anticipating the teachings of the Second Vatican Council twenty years beforehand. The two have several aspects in common, mainly in making laypeople aware of the universal call to sanctity and the missionary responsibility acquired in baptism. The results of the comparison show a similarity in the lexical choices. The article's conclusions and implications are considered in relation to the word in education and in evangelization.

*Keywords:* corpus linguistics, stylistic choices, Pope Francis

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## Introduction

The call for papers in this journal invited us to send proposals that would develop topics related to the Word in Education and several sub-themes. This paper relates to the subtheme of “encouraging and supportive ways of communication in teaching and parenting,” since evangelization could be somehow considered both teaching and parenting. The lexical frequencies in the writings of two pastors are compared: Pope Francis and the Spanish Jesuit Venerable Fr. Tomás Morales Pérez.

The paper begins with a description of corpus analysis and its applications for the study of literature. Then, the contextual part presents the two writers under comparison. The methodology section includes the corpus of writings being analysed and the software tool that performed the analysis, as well as the aim of the research. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Some conclusions are drawn in order to make a contribution to corpus analysis in literature.

## Theoretical Framework

### Corpus Analysis and Digital Humanities: The Concept and Its Applications

In linguistics, corpus analysis is a form of text analysis which permits comparisons between textual objects on a large scale. The potential of electronic corpora revolutionized linguistic research in the past few decades (Römer, 2011). Corpus analysis of electronic texts offers possibilities for applied linguistics, language pedagogy, lexicography, library and information science, and others. Corpus analysis is not only for linguists (Bowker, 2018); for instance, applications for pedagogical corpus analysis include syllabus or materials design, as well as direct applications for corpora in the second-language classroom (Sinclair, 2004; Reppen, 2010).

The label *digital humanities* refers to emerging methodologies that apply computational techniques to questions in the humanities. The

digital humanities offer what Berry (2011) called the “computational turn,” a fundamentally different way of engaging with digitized documents. Traditional humanities methods provide what has been called *close reading*, in contrast to *distant reading*, which electronic corpora enable. Close reading can only uncover a small portion of a given archive or corpus at once. “Distant reading refers to the processing of content in (subjects, themes, persons, places, etc.) or information about (publication date, place, author, title) a large number of textual items without engaging in the reading of the actual text” (Drucker, 2013, p. 62). This form of distant reading reveals facts that may not be necessarily noticed by a human reader. Corpus analysis provides empirical data, so it is especially useful for testing intuitions about texts (Szudarski, 2018). In addition, when distant reading is combined with traditional methods, this approach has the potential to uncover new patterns.

### Corpus Analysis and Literature

In the context of digital humanities described above, corpus-based analytical techniques have also been applied to the study of literature. This application of corpus linguistics tools in literary texts is commonly referred to as *corpus stylistics* (Biber, 2011). Research in this field focuses on the distribution of words (analyzing keywords, lexical phrases, or collocations of words). One of the purposes is to identify textual features that may be especially distinctive of an author or a particular text. Biber (2011) clarified that this research approach blends the methods of corpus analysis and its qualitative and quantitative results with the traditional stylistic aims of stylistic research.

Computational and statistical research have dealt with authorship attribution and the literary style of writers such as Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, R. L. Stevenson, the Brothers Grimm, and Virginia Woolf, among others. A representative compilation of what can be achieved through corpus analysis in literature can be found in Keshabyan and Almela (2012) and Balossi (2015). The distant reading approach to the above-mentioned authors and their texts reveals facts which are not visible from a close reading approach and which make

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a contribution to understanding an author's style and achievement, for instance, the high number of words with violent connotations in the Grimms' *Cinderella*, the differentiation of a novel's characters through their vocabulary, or the different connotations in the use of diminutive forms.

This paper aims to make a contribution in proving the potential of this distant reading approach by comparing the lexical frequencies of the two writers described in the next section.

### **The Writers**

Pope Francis and Fr. Tomás Morales present some common features. They are both Jesuits. They both speak Spanish as their mother tongue. The timespan of the periods in which they wrote is 60 years, as Fr. Morales wrote the works analyzed herein between the 1960s and the 1980s, and Pope Francis wrote the three selected documents between 2013 and 2019. Neither of them is an academic or a literary writer; writing is a pastoral and apostolic instrument for both of them. The two Jesuits concur in the ideas transmitted in these writings; they both had a large responsibility in the Church. Finally, the two authors both live what they preach. These coincidences and similarities bring meaning to the research question addressed in this paper.

After a brief comment of Pope Francis's vocabulary, Fr. Morales will be presented since he is less known and some information about him and his written works will facilitate the comprehension of this paper's aim and contribution.

### **Pope Francis's Vocabulary**

Pope Francis has shown himself to be "a great communicator." His language shows the traces of his Latin American spirit. He speaks with the style of a pastor, in contrast with St. John Paul II, whose communicative style was connected with his knowledge of the word in poetry and theater. He is unpretentious and he makes his message accessible to

everyone. For this Pope, words are of fundamental importance due to their ability to build both bridges and walls, as reflected in a book which collects the key words in his ministry (McElwee & Wooden, 2020). His particular vocabulary has received the label of *Bergoglismos* (Nuñez, 2018). Expressions such as “*primerear*” [to take the first step], “*Hagan lío*” [Make a ruckus!], the sin of “*habriaqueísmo*” [wasting time talking about “what needs to be done”] or “*No balconeen la vida*” [Don’t stand aloof!] are a real challenge to convey in other languages. Translators try their best but suffer from the limitations of various languages to render the spontaneity and richness of the source expression.

This feature of the Pope’s linguistic style could be the object of study of a complete research paper. The above expressions are *Hapax Legomenon* (*ἄπαξ λεγόμενον*), meaning that they appear only once in a text. This paper rather focuses on the words most frequently used in Pope Francis’s writings, specifically the four apostolic exhortations under study.

### Fr. Tomás Morales Pérez, SJ

Fr. Tomás Morales was born in 1908 in Macuto, Venezuela. After studying at a Jesuit school and studying law in Madrid and obtaining his doctorate in Bologna, he joined the Jesuits in 1932 and was ordained in 1941 in Spain. He dedicated his priesthood to the development of the laity. He founded secular institutes of the Crusaders of Mary for both men (1955) and women (1965); he set up the family movement Homes of Mary and the apostolic youth movement Militia of Mary. As a Jesuit, Fr. Morales drew on the formative influence of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises to provide a spiritual backbone for these movements.

In life he was known for his holiness; the process of his beatification began in 2000, less than a decade after his death. Pope Francis confirmed that Fr. Morales had led a model life of heroic virtue and declared him Venerable in 2017.<sup>1</sup> His experience and educational approaches appear clearly in his books, of which there have been several editions and translations.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about his life and cause for beatification see <https://padretomasmorales.weebly.com>.

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A summary of these books as well as the key aspect of each one is presented below.

1. *Forja de Hombres* [*The Forge of Men*] (Madrid: 1966, 1968, 1978, 1987, 4th Spanish ed): concrete points to direct the formation of apostles and lay movements
2. *Laicos en Marcha* [*Laity on the Move*] (Madrid: 1965, 1976, 1984, 3rd Spanish ed.): a series of encouraging principles to promote the apostolic action of the laity
3. *Hora de los laicos* [*The Hour of the Laity*] (Madrid: 1985, Spanish ed.; 1999, English ed.): reflections on the potential strength of the laity and on the greatness of the lay Christian vocation

Fr. Morales has been called the prophet of our time because before the Second Vatican Council he emphasized the essential and non-transferable role that laypeople have in the Church and their potential for evangelization. Thus, he anticipated the teachings of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965), the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

The *Forge of Men* is perhaps the most emblematic and popular of his writings. Requests for it arrive continually at the Postulation of his cause for canonization. In 2017, the book was translated into French, English, German, and Italian. The Polish translation was published in 2018, with a prologue by Sławomir Oder, Postulator of St. John Paul II's cause for canonization. These translations allow speakers of other languages to have access to this unique book, presented outside the linguistic and cultural context in which it was developed. The originality of the work resides in its intimate connection with experience. Ignatian pedagogy permeates the book and offers the reader the experience of a new way to educate young people through virtues, education of heart, clear thinking, and strong will. In spite of these emerging translations of his works, Fr. Morales is still largely unknown outside the Spanish-speaking world.

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## Methodology

### Study Corpus and Aims

This study compares two collections of texts: the four apostolic exhortations by Pope Francis and three books by Fr. Morales. The four apostolic exhortations are as follows:

1. *Evangelii Gaudium* [*The Joy of the Gospel*], 2013
2. *Amoris Laetitia* [*On Love in the Family*], 2016
3. *Gaudete et exsultate* [*Rejoice and Be Glad*], 2018
4. *Christus vivit* [*Christ is Alive*], 2019

An apostolic exhortation is a magisterial document written by the Pope which generally encourages the faithful to practice a particular virtue, attitude, or activity. An exhortation does not define Church doctrine and is not considered legislative. These four apostolic exhortations will be compared with Fr. Morales's pedagogical trilogy.

1. *Forja de Hombres* [*The Forge of Men*]
2. *Laicos en Marcha* [*Laity on the Move*]
3. *Hora de los laicos* [*The Hour of the Laity*]

The purpose of these three books is also to encourage. Thus, *The Forge of Men* encourages the educator of youth to follow four cardinal points in the process of education: demanding spirit, fighting spirit, the cultivation of reflection, and the school of constancy. *Laity on the Move* presents encouraging principles to promote apostolic action among the laity; the reflections about Christianity in *The Hour of the Laity* encourage people to live the demands of our baptismal vocation in society.

As mentioned above, this research aims to make a contribution to prove the potential of distant reading. Distant reading, as defined in the theoretical framework, entails the processing of content or information without engaging in the reading of the actual text. The main research question concerns the most frequent vocabulary in the two sets of texts.

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This approach has been applied to literature in the artistic sense of the word. This paper applies this distant reading to the domain of spiritual and religious literature, a field in which, to our knowledge, this type of analysis has not yet been performed.

### **Analytical Tool**

The manual process of counting the words or the times each word occurs would be time-consuming, labor-intensive, and error-prone. However, this type of work is easily accomplished by a computer, which name carries the etymological meaning of counting. Specialized software tools can be used to calculate several different measures of frequency, statistical analysis of linguistic data, and other functionalities.

The software used in this research is Antconc Concordance, a free software program developed by Laurence Anthony of Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. This software contains various tools for corpus analysis: a concordancer with numerous functions, a collocation searcher, a word lister, and a keyword tool. It also provides information about the number of words (tokens) and of different words (types) in the corpus. Thus, if the word “universal” occurs three times, it is counted as three tokens but only one type. The relationship between the number of types and the number of tokens is known as the type-token ratio (TTR). This study uses the Word List tool, which takes the words in the corpus and ranks them in order of frequency.

In the interface of the Word List tool (see Figure 1), the first column (Rank) shows the position of the word in the frequency list. The second column (Frequency) displays the number of times each word is repeated. The third column (Word) presents the word itself.

The processing of frequency lists in any running text will show the most frequently used words of any language on the top ranks: articles, prepositions, some connectors, and determiners. These words are called function words because they do not convey any lexical meaning. On the other hand, words with lexical meaning (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are called content words and they provide more valuable information in corpus analysis (Szudarski, 2018).

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Function words will be ranked highest in frequency (for instance “the,” “and,” “for,” and “of”) regardless the type of texts. For this reason, the software includes “stop lists,” which can exclude the most common function words from being counted and displayed in the frequency list. A stop list was applied in this research so that the frequency list would start with only content words.

In summary, the steps in the research process were as follows:

- 1) Corpus compilation and adaptation to the format required by the software tool
- 2) Generation of a word list
- 3) Application of a stop list to ignore function words
- 4) Second generation of a word list
- 5) Comparison/contrast/interpretation

These steps are in accordance with the guidelines established for research in corpus linguistics (Biber et al., 1998). Research begins with quantitative findings and works toward qualitative ones. However, the procedure may have cyclical elements depending on the research question and on the data themselves.

## **Results**

As stated above, one of the applications of corpus analysis is the testing of intuitions. At this stage of the paper, before communicating any results, we would like to interact with our readers by inviting them to hypothesize which content words appear most frequently in Pope Francis’s four apostolic exhortations. The answers to this question may depend on whether they have read the exhortations (or at least some of them) or not. However, any response will always be intuitive, because readers will rely either on thematic content, previous knowledge, familiarity with the author, or other similar variables. In contrast, the software tool will provide empirical evidence. The same applies to readers of Fr. Morales, who

are invited to conjecture about the content words which would be at the top of a frequency list.

The first step in the analysis was to calculate the word list for each of the four exhortations using the software tool. The highest ranked words are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Words most frequently found in Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortations**

Exhortation	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	<i>Gaudete et exsultate</i>	<i>Christus vivit</i>
Three most frequently used words	Dios [God] Iglesia [Church] vida [life]	amor [love] familia [family] vida [life]	jóvenes [youths] vida [life] dios [God]	Dios [God] vida [life] señor [Lord]

It can be observed that the most common words in each exhortation are closely related to the central subject of the exhortations, for example, “love” in *Amoris Laetitia*. If the lexical frequency is calculated using the complete corpus of the four exhortations, “vida” [“life”] obviously becomes the word ranked first, as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Total frequencies in Pope Francis’s exhortations**

Corpus Files		Concordance	Concordance Plot	File View	Cluster
amoris-laetitia.txt christus-vivit.txt evangelii-gaudium.txt gaudete-et-exsultate.t		Word Types: 13557		Word Tokens: 89087	
Rank	Freq	Word			
1	768	vida			
2	748	dios			
3	628	amor			
4	531	iglesia			
5	516	ser			
6	359	jóvenes			
7	333	familia			
8	317	siempre			
9	311	todos			
10	303	mismo			
11	299	bien			
12	298	jesús			
13	289	señor			
14	271	mundo			
15	252	espíritu			
16	230	fe			
17	224	corazón			
18	224	evangelio			
19	218	veces			

Regarding Fr. Morales, the same analysis was done with the Word List tool for the individual books. Table 2 summarizes the results.

**Table 2. Words most frequently found in Fr. Morales’s pedagogical trilogy**

Book	<i>The Forge of Men</i>	<i>Laity on the Move</i>	<i>The Hour of the Laity</i>
Three most frequently used words	vida [life] Dios [God] jóvenes [youths]	amor [love] familia [family] vida [life]	jóvenes [youths] vida [life] Dios [God]

For a second time, “vida” [“life”] is one of the most common words in all three books, so therefore it is the highest ranked word. Figure 2 shows the word list for the pedagogical trilogy.

**Figure 2. Total frequencies in Fr. Morales’s trilogy**

Rank	Freq	Word
1	1098	vida
2	1022	mundo
3	997	dios
4	731	cristo
5	673	iglesia
6	584	hombre
7	545	ser
8	541	todos
9	506	pablo
10	476	amor
11	461	fe
12	460	hombres
13	411	hace
14	410	siempre
15	393	años
16	381	mismo
17	349	hacer
18	344	juan
19	343	puede

Those who have read these books would find that these top ranked words are significant and in close connection with the main content of the three books. Some clarifications will help to make this list more meaningful

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for those who have not read the books. These clarifications, at the same time, will illustrate how the lexical items of a text can provide a transparent view of the content.

Firstly, the words “hombre” [“man”] and “hombres” [“men”] could be grouped together, as they share the same lemma. It is a common practice in corpus analysis to group and count together words that share the same base form (Bowker, 2018). Thus, if adding the frequency of “man” to the frequency of “men,” this lemma would rise to the second position in the list. It has to be said that these words are used here in their inclusive, generic meaning and should not be at all interpreted as exclusively masculine. The Spanish language allows this grammatical use of the inclusive masculine, which is highly recommended by the Spanish Royal Academy of Language. Fr. Morales follows this recommendation in all his writings.

Secondly, we find the similar case of the verbal forms “hacer” [“to do”] and “hace” [“does”], keeping in mind that the latter could also mean the homograph expression of time (*hace* = ago). They are both inflections of the same verbal meaning. Fr. Morales requests actions and, in his application of Ignatian pedagogy, he encourages actions. Therefore, a high frequency of this verb is expected.

Finally, the proper names “Pablo” [“Paul”] and “Juan” [“John”] are among the twenty most frequently used words in the corpus. The explanation for this can easily be proven using the Concordance tool, another utility within the *AntConc* software package. A concordance of the words “Pablo” and “Juan” reveals that they are combined in an elevated number of instances. These are the numerous references to Pope Saint John Paul II. These references appear only in the latest edition of the trilogy, which was updated by Fr. Morales with references to and quotations of the then Pontifex. References to Pope Saint Paul VI and the Apostle Saint Paul are also abundant. Regarding “Juan,” apart from the Pope mentioned above, Fr. Morales makes reference to St. John of the Cross and St. John Chrysostom. The high frequency of these two masculine proper names is a visible indicator of Fr. Morales’s continuous reference to pontifical magisterium and to the teachings of the saints.

In the case of these three examples, research began with quantitative findings and worked toward qualitative ones, as stated in the methodology (Biber et al., 1998).

### Comparing and Contrasting Lexical Frequencies

The frequency lists of the two writers are displayed together in Figure 3. The coincidence the majority of the words most frequently used by the two Jesuits can be observed. With some variations in rank, they make use of the same content words or words within the same or related semantic scope. For example, the Pope does not use the generic “man/men,” but rather “youth” and “family.” Thus, both writers make profuse references to the person. This is very much related to Ignatian spirituality, in which the person is at the center.

**Figure 3. Comparison and contrast of total frequencies**



“Life,” “God,” and “Church” are ranked among the first five positions in both lists. “Faith,” “love,” and “heart” are also in both lists, though in different positions. Another similarity is the presence of names like “Christ” (in Fr. Morales) and “Jesús” (in Pope Francis). In this lexical choice, Fr. Morales

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remains very close to the most frequent Ignatian vocabulary, while the Pope opts for a more popular form in consonance, perhaps, with a Latin American style. However, in both cases “Christ/Jesus” is also among the most common words.

The list shows the high frequency of the names “Paul” and “John” in Fr. Morales’s writings. As already mentioned, this fact signals his continuous references to Church teachings from the Popes or from the saints. In contrast, Pope Francis’s list shows a high frequency of the words “Lord” and “Spirit.” This could be interpreted as the Pope referring here to spiritual authorities other than himself, while Fr. Morales mentions and quotes the Pontifices and saints as authorities.

The verb “ser” is also ranked very high in both lists. In Spanish, the verb “to be” can be rendered in two different verbs: *ser* and *estar*. *Estar* makes more reference to temporary status, while *ser* brings the idea of permanence and of essence, a more ontological dimension. The presence of this infinitive among the ten most frequent words is surprising because nouns could be expected to be more frequent than verbs in the infinitive form. One possible interpretation could be the connection with the Ignatian features of perseverance, permanence, and going to the essential.

So far, the analyzed words are nouns and verbs. However, the list of top ranked items also includes adverbs and quantifiers: “siempre” [“always”], “todos” [“all”], and “mismo” [“the same”]. These words could have been included in a stop list and consequently removed from the frequency list. The decision to leave them was based on the fact that they are connected to Ignatian pedagogy and spirituality. The ideas of permanence, inclusiveness, and repetition are conveyed by these three words, respectively.

## Conclusions

Comparability is one of the most important aspects of scientific research. Literary analysis was not able to produce comparability before the advent of electronic corpora and software tools for corpus exploration.

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However, “computer tools don’t do the thinking,” as stated in one of the screens of Wordsmith Tools, another software package for corpus analysis (Scott, 1996). The frequency lists are the result of a rapid and precise programming algorithm. Nonetheless, the results could only be interpreted in light of the content and our knowledge of the writers.

The comparison of these two writers using software falls into the distant reading approach described in the theoretical framework. The issues discovered in this comparison could have never been found if the writings had been analyzed individually or without the Word List tool. Some subtle uses of language were appreciated by placing the texts next to each other. The comparison of lexical frequencies also revealed that the words which are ranked highest in the writings of both authors are everyday words. It was somehow surprising that these words were very similar in both.

These findings add to other already known features of their styles. Their language is simple and accessible to everyone. Their language is that of a speaker who is accustomed to be in contact with people. They use neologisms, vocabulary, and examples to reinforce a concept, sometimes to the point that the listener can hardly forget it. As another screen message reads in Wordsmith Tools, “much can be inferred from what is absent” (Scott, 1996). In Pope Francis and Fr. Morales, complex terms are absent though elegant and rich vocabulary are maintained. This absence of lexical complexity seems to reinforce their educational attempts.

An empirically derived statement about a tendency is obviously more accurate than any other statement derived from intuition. Thus, the empirical data from these frequency lists allow us to draw some conclusions. The conclusions are presented in three points to stay faithful to the three usual points around which Pope Francis articulates his sermons or speeches.

1. Fr. Tomás Morales, as a Jesuit, lived the *Sentire cum Ecclesia*. Those who have read his writings, those who met him, and those who know the movements he founded experience this *Sentire cum Ecclesia*. The frequency lists provide empirical evidence that he also used the same words as the Pontifex. It could be argued that

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two different messages could be written with the same lexical items and nevertheless convey totally opposite meanings. This is not the case, since Fr. Morales's writings are, in their content, in total communion with the Church's teachings. The empirical results of this analysis may serve to support this notion.

2. This study has revealed the most frequent words which two Jesuits employed in a selection of their writings to encourage evangelization. But some of these words can serve in dialogue with those of different faiths or of none. Life, love, the world, young people, families, and men (the person is implicit in these last three), for example, are concepts of universal concern. The scope of the Church's teachings reaches every person and all dimensions of humankind. These frequent words could provide a bridge towards those who do not consider the Church *Mater et Magistra* but who nonetheless search for the truth and work for the common good.
3. The high frequencies of some words recall the repetition exercise which St. Ignatius proposed in his Spiritual Exercises. A repetition exercise demands that a meditation be returned to with the purpose of extracting the best from it, the repeated ideas and words. Repetition should not be associated with boredom.

It could be affirmed that the distant reading approach applied with the Word List tool has proven the potential to uncover patterns which both authors share and that it could not have been discovered with the close reading approach, thus the research aim proposed in the paper has been accomplished. As a closing paragraph of the paper and after the three points of the conclusion, this quote recalls the importance of repetition in education in general and in Ignatian pedagogy:

The educator of the youth must be on guard against a temptation ...: to think he has to be constantly saying new things .... Every day the same concept will have to be reiterated; each time in a different way, it is true, but always emphasizing the same basic theme. (Morales, 1987, p. 187)

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## Politics and the Inadequacy of Words in Joseph Conrad's Non-Fiction

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### Abstract

The Polish-born English novelist, Joseph Conrad, once challenged the general public with a statement which stigmatized the printed word in wartime coverage as being cold, silent, and colorless. The aim of this article is to investigate the manner in which the writer himself applied words in his wartime non-fictional works in order to bestow a lasting effect on his texts. It is argued that irony renders his non-fiction memorable. Thus, the focus is first placed on the manner in which irony features in Conrad's political essays, collected in *Notes on Life and Letters*, from 1921. It is argued that irony applied in his non-fiction represents what Wayne C. Booth termed *stable* irony. Further, it is claimed that, as a spokesman for a non-existent country, Conrad succeeded in transposing the Polish perspective into a discourse familiar to the British public. This seems possible due to the application of the concept of the body politic and the deployment of Gothic imagery. Finally, the paper examines the manner in which words are effectively used to voice the stance of a moralist on truth and the lie of the printed word in the turbulent times around the end of the 19th century.

*Keywords:* the Polish problem, *stable* irony, binary oppositions, the body politic, Gothic imagery

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## Introduction

The contemporary world seems to be governed by the written word: the media and information technologies are replete with bold headings and hyperlinks, and users worldwide find nothing untoward in unceasingly clicking on links that transfer them to new sites. Arguably, this does not necessarily entail a proportionate increase in knowledge, and neither does it expand mental horizons: as Nicholas Carr convincingly contended, the more often we click, the more superficial and cursory are our findings (Carr, 2010, pp. 6–7, 136–137). Consequently, internet users are left with an overabundance of words and informational chaos which hardly enriches them, instead leaving them confused and overwhelmed. Frequently, the verbal message is accompanied by images which render the process of chaotic discovery even more bewildering. This is particularly so in the case of politics, since, arguably, each party involved in a political debate aims to find favor with the most readers, viewers, or users possible. The words they employ frequently leave no trace in the minds of the recipients and this seems to render them flawed, or inefficient.

The issue of the adequacy of a verbal representation of reality and the capacity of language to faithfully represent the world attracted academic attention in the 20th century with particular force: several 20th-century philosophers and linguists – the most famous probably being Martin Heidegger,<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida,<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure,<sup>3</sup> and Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>4</sup> –

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<sup>1</sup> Although Martin Heidegger did not deliver any systematic critique of language, the philosopher dedicated several works to related issues, for example, *On the Way to Language and Poetry, Language, Thought*. A discussion on Heidegger's stance on the philosophy of language and speech is included in Wayne D. Owens (1988, pp. 49–66).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, (2011, pp. 39–44).

<sup>3</sup> For an insightful description of Saussurean thought on semantics see Ricoeur (2003, pp. 140–146).

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein investigated language in terms of language games in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

enquired into the nature of language in both its written and oral forms.<sup>5</sup>

However, since Joseph Conrad openly argued against “the authority of a school [as] a weakness of inferior minds”<sup>6</sup> (Conrad, 2008, p. 8), I do not intend to discuss the theoretical and philosophical considerations; instead, I wish to trace Conrad’s particular way of applying language in order to create his own literary vision.<sup>7</sup> In his 1914 literary manifesto,<sup>8</sup> the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*,<sup>9</sup> Conrad described his artistic craft thusly: “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*” (Conrad, 1964, 23; italics original). This paper aims to delineate the process of creating such a vision in texts that focus on European politics in the first half of the 20th century. Particular attention is placed on Conrad’s non-fictional, political essays: “Autocracy and War” (1905), “The Crime of Partition” (1919), and “A Note on the Polish Problem” (1916).<sup>10</sup> Although the essays were published in different years, they all feature in the 1921 collection of non-fiction, entitled *Notes on Life and Letters*.

<sup>5</sup> The philosophers listed above regarded as fundamental the differentiation between language conceived of as speech and the linguistic sign system; since the frame of this article is different, I leave the question aside.

<sup>6</sup> A negative view on Conrad’s explicit dismissal of literary schools and movements is expressed by Samuel Hynes and quoted in Watt (1979, pp. 77, 147).

<sup>7</sup> The term “vision” is evocative, since it appears as a literary concept in Conrad’s essays and non-fiction; see also “the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadows” and “a moment of vision” in Conrad (1964, p. 64). and a “direct vision of a fact” in “Autocracy and War” in Conrad (2008, p. 50).

<sup>8</sup> Zdzisław Najder called it “[Conrad’s] best known theoretical piece” (Najder, 1983A, p. 211).

<sup>9</sup> It was not included in the British version of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, a subject recorded in the Foreword written for American readers in the 1914 American edition of the novel.

<sup>10</sup> Conrad’s fiction is generally perceived as being “concerned with a capacity for political vision” (Niland, as cited in Stape, 2015, p. 29).

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### Joseph Conrad and Politics

It is not exactly surprising that Joseph Conrad viewed politics as a serious matter. The Polish-born English writer, Józef Konrad Korzeniowski, published his works in Britain at the end of the 19th century, which was a time of major political transformation in Europe – particularly in Poland, which regained its independence after 123 years of being partitioned. As a son of political prisoners who were victims of Russian persecution, Conrad went with his parents into exile in Siberia, during which time his mother died, followed by his father four years later. Thus, the issue of a punitive political struggle which often victimizes individuals was a personal matter for Conrad. Moreover, since Conrad's life experience involved the aftermath of a lost political cause – a cause defeated by a much greater power, namely, Russia – the inadequacy of words to express his despair appears to be a major issue. Conrad's case is still further complicated, as his adulthood was to be inextricably linked to the good fortune of another imperial power; in 1886 Conrad became a naturalized citizen of Great Britain. Consequently, his position in the political arena was problematic: on the one hand, the writer openly expressed his disapproval of Russia as an imperial state and its Eastern culture and authoritarian policies; on the other hand, Conrad endorsed and felt part of a Western empire – Great Britain. Finally, Conrad's literary output was composed exclusively in English,<sup>11</sup> which has been a point of contention among his compatriots, who, like Perłowski, argued against his alleged patriotism. In an article on the British writer, Perłowski stated that "in all [Conrad's] works there was no mention of Poland" (as cited in Najder, 1983b, p. 159)<sup>12</sup> The critic added, "evidently, Conrad does not believe in Poland's future but still nurtures a deep hatred for her oppressors" (Perłowski as cited in Najder, 1983a, 159). The ambivalence of Conrad's attitude towards the politics of his homeland raises questions regarding the way the "deep hatred

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this issue see Watt (1979, p. 32).

<sup>12</sup> Perłowski's article, titled "On Conrad and Kipling," is included in Najder (1983, pp. 150–170).

for [Poland's] oppressors" is made evident in Conrad's non-fictional, political essays. In my view, Conrad's audacious openness, which is characteristic of a spokesman for freedom and democracy and is exhibited in the essays, stands in stark contrast to the suggestive, yet spare style of writing in his political novels – as is the case with, for example, *Under Western Eyes*. However, in both cases the opposition between East and West appears to be a fundamental concept; in fact, the binary opposition is a crux around which Conrad's hatred of the Russian autocracy is revealed.

### Irony and Linguistic Efficiency

It is no coincidence that Conrad's predilection for irony left its distinct mark on the rhetoric of his essays and novels focusing on pre-WWI European politics: the idea of a political conflict, whose cause was lost even as it was formulated, was a fundamental issue in the mind of a writer whose parents and Polish compatriots were the victims of a totalitarian power. Thus, the mode of irony must have seemed quite natural to expose and, in a way, to neutralize the aftereffects of such a lost cause. As far as his essays are concerned, arguably, the mode of irony serves particularly well the aim to expose controversial allegations in a manner that observes the common rules of decency and respect while at the same time establishing a basis for calling into question an apparently straightforward statement. In other words, an ironic point is safely made. As Wayne C. Booth put it, irony "delimits a world of discourse in which we can say with great security certain things that are violated by the overt words of the discourse" (Booth, 1974, p. 6). However, as indicated, irony may also assist in the processes of neutralizing specific content that is linked to unwelcome memories. As regards such processes, David Lowenthal asserted that irony is one of the mechanisms which helps debar past memories from their oppressive impact on an individual (Lowenthal, 2015, pp. 129–142).

Interestingly, Conrad's 1905 political essay, "Autocracy and War," included in the 1921 collection *Notes on Life and Letters*, opens with

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a seemingly lengthy, even confusing and at times ironic digression on the Russo–Japanese War. It feels protracted because, instead of contributing a commentary on the war – as the title suggests – it somewhat provocatively devotes considerable attention to the issue of language; indeed, after a few opening lines built upon the pattern of the exotic – which David Lodge termed “the mediation of an ‘abroad’ to an audience assumed to be located at ‘home’” (Lodge, 1992, p. 159) – Conrad apparently leaves the Japanese to one side and shifts his attention to Europe. It becomes apparent that the Russo–Japanese war serves as a mere pretext to engage in a debate upon European politics. However, before shifting the focus from the Japanese war to Europe, the essayist pondered on language and its efficiency. Conrad observed that

we have seen these things [i.e., the war], though we have seen them only in the cold, silent, colorless print of books and newspapers. In stigmatizing the printed word as cold, silent, and colorless, I have no intention of putting a slight upon the fidelity and the talents of [writers and journalists] .... I only wished to suggest that ... the war ... has been made known to us, so far, in a grey reflection ... a reflection seen in the perspective of thousands of miles, in the dim atmosphere of official reticence, through the veil of inadequate words. (Conrad, 2008, p. 50)

Although it is not as clear as in subsequent passages of “Autocracy and War,” the irony of the initial sentences quoted above can easily be discerned by those who have read Conrad’s literary manifesto from *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. In the Preface to that book, a specific emphasis is placed on the power of literary fiction to create a vision, in other words, to “make [the readers] see” (Conrad, 1964, p. 23). Thus, the overt “we have seen these things,” a statement immediately questioned by the concessive “though,” ironically affirms the incapacity to appropriately visualize the war on the part of those who have only read the dry accounts furnished by British newspapers. The covert, ironic indictment suggested

in the passage is the very opposite of what is overtly stated: nothing can be “seen” since it is misrepresented by weak, “inadequate” words and cold statistics. The careful choice of words, which violate neither grammar nor semantics, allows for an ironic reconstruction of meaning. In addition, a further suggestion makes it clear that a verbal, inadequate (mis)representation creates “a grey reflection” which in fact constitutes a distortion of reality – blurred, indistinct, and “veiled.” It *re-reflects*, or even *de-reflects*, the actual vision owing to the huge, geographical distance between the actual theatre of war – Manchuria – and Britain, as well as by the divergent cultural contexts and the lack of necessary knowledge on the part of both the readership and the authors of the “inadequate words.”

Arguably, Conrad makes explicit his attitude towards inappropriate language use in order to prepare the ground for his own “adequate” commentary on politics: despite stigmatizing the printed word, Conrad at a later stage in the essay attempts his own interpretation through the mode of irony; indeed irony permeates the entire text of “Autocracy and War” and is one of the modes applied in Conrad’s later political essays, “A Note on the Polish Problem” (1916) and “The Crime of Partition” (1919). In “Autocracy and War,” Conrad’s ironic tone becomes particularly daring – even openly sarcastic – when stigmatizing the alleged over-sensitivity and naivety of the British – for example, in a passage deriding “these Arcadian tears” of the Victorian sentimentalists (Conrad, 2008a, p. 51) – as well as the propagated, self-imposed greatness of “Russia’s might” (p. 53). If examined against these ironic patterns, Conrad’s later political essays evince the same semantic fields of ironic stigmatization, that is, denouncing European sentimentality and the authoritarian and autocratic designs of both Russia and Prussia. Thus, in “The Crime of Partition,” Conrad ironically deplores “the diplomatic tears [shed] over the transaction [of Poland’s final partition]” (p. 67) and in “A Note on the Polish Problem” he ironically posits that the Russian “public recognition of a mistake in [the act of Poland’s partition] cannot damage the prestige of a powerful State” (p. 80). Certainly, a contextual analysis of the essays reveals that Conrad persisted in the idea of Russian weakness and lawlessness,

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Prussian arrogance, and the sentimental turn of mind of the Western European states.<sup>13</sup>

As numerous critics have emphasized (Booth, 1974, 1983, pp. 300ff; Fludernik, 1993, pp. 350–356; Muecke, 2017, pp. 56–102), irony may be examined in a variety of ways. Since my particular interest in this case is non-fiction and the genre of the political essay, I will discuss only a sub-category – favored by such a discourse – namely, the “stable irony” (Booth, 1974, pp. 1–31). It seems that *stable* irony is particularly applicable to non-fiction since it does not depend on a subjective reading, but is a permanent feature of the text – even if it is reconstructive in nature (pp. 33–44). In his seminal work, *The Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth claimed that stable irony exhibits four major features: it is *intended* by the author, it alludes to *covert* meaning whose reading is *stable* or fixed, and it is *finite* in application (1974, pp. 5–6). In other words, stable irony presupposes a level of communication between the speaker and the listener, and the act of determining the ironic point cannot be an matter of negotiation: stable ironic statements are finite as regards the limits of their reconstruction. Thus, it differs from the popular concept of irony “in the sense that once the reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions .... [since] the reconstructed meaning ... [is] in some sense local, limited” (p. 6). I wish to suggest that Conrad’s ironic vision of the difficult relations between the states of Europe at the end of the 19th century can be reconstructed in one way only: that it is biased against an authoritarian Russia and, as a consequence, shows little appreciation for its Eastern culture, literature, and politics. In this sense, the ironic discourse of Conrad’s political essays is stable and its stability is rather provocatively aimed at igniting a discussion – in other words, it serves a pragmatic aim.<sup>14</sup> The provocative nature of irony is, in fact, an intrinsic property since,

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<sup>13</sup> Arguably, due to pragmatics, the tone of “A Note on the Polish Problem” is subtler, since it is aimed at a clearly defined political target – the realization of a protectorate – achieved with Russia’s agreement. Cf. (Conrad, 2008a, p. 5).

<sup>14</sup> Consider Conrad’s commentary on the delivery of “A Note on the Polish Problem” (Conrad, 2008a, p. 5).

according to Monika Fludernik, "irony is always a pragmatic phenomenon of an implicational nature ... which ... requires a recuperatory move on the reader's part" (Fludernik, 1993, p. 352).

Interestingly, in Conrad's political essays, "the recuperatory move" is facilitated, as it is suggested in the semantics of the straightforward passages; in the latter, Conrad openly reveals his hatred towards autocratic states, and particularly towards Russia. The overt passages describing "the ill-omened phantom of Russia's might" (Conrad, 2008a, p. 56) form a definite basis for the ironic passages and serve as a guide for the less direct expressions. Indeed, in Conrad's political essays, stable irony is intertwined with straightforward seriousness and, at times, overt outspokenness concerning the political systems of 20th-century Europe. Thus, if Conrad is ironic about the extent of "the real progress of humanitarian ideas" (p. 50), he becomes harsh and outspoken when elaborating upon "Russia's influence in Europe" (p. 55). This interlacement of straightforwardness and irony is not unexpected, particularly in critical commentaries; as Booth observes, "stable irony does [express condemnation] much more forcefully, because it contains the invitation to a further judgement about both ... the use of irony and the fairness of employing such a weapon of contempt" (Booth, 1974, p. 43). Thus, the effectiveness of language in the essays examined above depends on its modal characteristics, that is, having an ironic overtone.

### Eastern and Western Polarity

As indicated above, the inefficiency of a verbal representation of the reality of life was an important issue for Conrad who, as a *homo duplex* with divided loyalties (Pacukiewicz, 2008, 146–159), must have been constantly struggling over the manner in which to address the problem of political supremacy. As a Pole in his heart, alongside his fellow compatriots he belonged to the oppressed; as a Briton by choice, he represented the supremacy of a European superpower. As has already been underlined, the mode of irony proved an efficient means with which to comply with

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the rules of propriety in word and print, yet, at the same time, to infer an assessment of certain contested issues that could prove to be unwelcome. Apart from irony, another means that enabled the expression of Polish viewpoints on European politics is the application of the East–West binary in his prose. I wish to suggest that, particularly in “Autocracy and War,” the polarity between Eastern and Western Europe is made salient: the binary forms the crux not only of this essay, but also of Conrad’s other writings which encompass European politics.<sup>15</sup>

The polarity is carefully constructed and the construct draws upon both verbal and non-verbal means of expression. Since “Autocracy and War” opens with an admission regarding the inefficiency of the printed word, the speaker – a Westerner<sup>16</sup> – uses language in a subversive manner through irony and sarcasm. The disclaimer with respect to language efficiency is circumvented by both the mode of irony and negative imagery. Thus, the verbal layer is supplemented, and indeed strengthened, by visual means. It seems that in order to win over the minds of the British, and indeed the Western world in its entirety, in his struggle against autocratic aspirations,<sup>17</sup> Conrad satirically overplays the Western concept of the body politic. Arguably, the introduction of this concept, interlaced with the binary opposition of East and West, helps transform the unfamiliar viewpoint of the Polish *raison d'état* into a political concept which sounds familiar to a Western audience. However, the manner in which Conrad applies the concept of the body politic is idiosyncratic: the writer employs an overdrawn Gothic version, with his political essays investigating and exploring a distorted version of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Body Politic*. In Chapter 11, Book II, the well-known philosopher claims that “the body politic, as much as the human body, begins to die from its birth on, and bears within itself the causes of its destruction” (Rousseau,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Conrad’s fiction, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*.

<sup>16</sup> The speaker’s cultural background is distinctly Western: he refers to Italian literature (Dante’s *Inferno*) and mentions legendary ancient warriors such as Scipio and Hannibal (Conrad, 2008a, pp. 52–53).

<sup>17</sup> The speaker stigmatizes Russian autocratic tendencies and Prussian imperialism alike.

2012, p. 91). The implied finality of the destruction suggested by Rousseau seems to constitute the point of departure for Conrad's hypothesis – that the Russian state has ceased to exist and become a ghost, a ghost still revered by naïve European states. Conrad affirms:

for a hundred years the ghost of Russian might, overshadowing with its fantastic bulk the councils of Central and Western Europe, sat upon the gravestone of autocracy, cutting off from air, from light, from all knowledge of themselves and of the world, the buried millions of Russian people. (Conrad, 2008, pp. 51–52)

What Rousseau merely intimated in his treatise becomes transformed into the overt culpability of Russia, culpability which is also reiterated in Conrad's other political essays: Russia as a state has deteriorated over time. The application of a well-known political concept includes a disarrangement which is executed in a Gothic fashion; apparently, it assists Conrad in debunking the alluring myth of Russian greatness disseminated in Europe by the discourse of propaganda. Ironically,<sup>18</sup> Conrad (2008) utilizes one of the fundamental Western concepts to explode the myth of the power and strength of the Eastern superpower. Thus, the body of the Russian state is visualized as a decomposing colossus on the verge of collapse and is consistently portrayed as "a gigantic and dreaded phantom" (p. 51), "a phantom which is disappearing now" (p. 56), and an "oppressive ghost" (p. 65). The rhetoric of the Gothic culminates in a sentence in an early part of the essay that reads, "the decrepit, old, hundred years old, spectre of Russia's might still faces Europe from across the teeming graves of Russian people" (p. 53). It can be inferred from the context that in this quotation Europe is equated with "the Western world" (p. 53).

As previously noted, "Autocracy and War" was Conrad's first political essay to articulate his indictment against Russia; it was written in a time of war, namely, the Russo–Japanese War. In two other political, non-fictional

<sup>18</sup> Here I use the word "ironically" in the more common, *unstable* way discussed by Booth (1974, pp. 2–3).

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texts centered around the polarity of Eastern and Western Europe, "A Note on the Polish Problem" (1916) and "The Crime of Partition" (1919), the geopolitical binary is sustained: Russia is consistently depicted as a dangerous, autocratic country. Although the major concern in both "A Note on the Polish Problem" and "The Crime of Partition" is the issue of Poland's independence,<sup>19</sup> which is beyond the scope of the present paper, I wish to emphasize that the essays were written with a pragmatic end in mind: they were designed as an official contribution to the debate upon the legitimacy of Poland's re-introduction to the maps of Europe. This could be said to be crucial when considered together with the title of the present article, because the ideas propounded in his essays, if not meant to achieve a specific political success, were at least to exert a certain influence on the potential readers, namely, the British, or Western Europeans. Thus, intended as a contribution to a political debate, the words were meant to be "good words" – in this case, "good" meaning "effective." To some extent, the words did indeed prove to be effective. Written and delivered to the British Foreign Office during WWI, "A Note on the Polish Problem" is believed to have informed "an anonymous memorandum prepared at the Foreign Office in the autumn of 1916, at the request of Herbert Henry Asquith, the prime minister" (Najder, 1983a, p. 417) in support of the Polish cause – to re-create Poland as an independent state in Europe.

As with irony, the polarity between East and West can be considered as being stable irony in Conradian prose: while the Eastern superpower, Russia, consistently features as a savage and totalitarian state, Western Europe is blamed for being weak and sentimentalist. The direct stance concerning the compelling need to adopt a new, unyielding approach towards Russia, alongside the outspoken charges against Europe's responsibility for the state of affairs, must have rendered the essay difficult to deal with in 1905; similarly, the other essays discussed above openly

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<sup>19</sup> Since "The Crime of Partition" was published in 1919 – when Poland had already regained its independence – it seems outdated: why re-assess long-established facts at the beginning of a long-awaited post-war era? However, at the time of the essay's first publication, not all European states had officially acknowledged Poland's independence (Najder, 1983a, p. 436).

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blame Western leniency toward Russia, which according to Conrad did not change in either 1916 or 1919. Thus, his standpoint on the issue of Poland's independence deserved a proper, "adequate" linguistic representation in print.

### Conrad's (In)adequacy

After a century, Conrad's essays still appear too outspoken and too direct: apparently, herein lies the reason for the recent decrease in popularity of the author among the contemporary readership. As pointed out above, Conrad argued that the printed word is efficient if it manages to recreate a vision in the minds of the reading public, a vision which might gain a distinct sharpness if it is visualized with the help of clear imagery. Described through the use of numerous metaphors, "the phantom of the Russian might" becomes visible by virtue of explicit Gothic traits and the application of the East–West binary. However, the contemporary world seems to not encourage explicitness and unambiguity: a "good" word today is not located in the stable binaries. Arguably, the removal of clear-cut definitions and notions may be located within the theory of relativism. It may also be rooted in several postmodern ideas which, quite convincing as they certainly are, challenge traditional theories and conventions.

As far as the issue of binary oppositions is concerned, it was investigated by Jacques Derrida; his findings prove quite helpful in delineating Conrad's application of the East–West polarity in his prose. In an interview included in *Positions*,<sup>20</sup> Derrida (1981) explains that binary oppositions are founded on the notions of accumulation and hierarchy, "a violent hierarchy" (p. 41) to be precise. According to Derrida, the structure of opposition is subordinating: "one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (p. 41). Each

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<sup>20</sup> *Positions* is a collection of three interviews discussing Derrida's concepts on literature and language that are elaborated upon in *Writing and Difference* and *Dissemination*.

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binary consists of two elements, the first of which is superordinate; it is supplemented by the second, subordinate element. The former accumulates and accrues a series of other superordinate meanings with regard to related binaries – as shown above in the case of the range of axiological terms and values represented, in Conrad's view, by the Western world. According to the postmodernist philosopher, the primary elements accrue and form a logocentric core around which the subordinate members gather, forming a periphery. However, Derrida argues that neither of the elements is expedient and that the second member of a binary pair, even if subordinate, has a vital meaning for the superordinate concept. Although Derrida, as a postmodern critic, ultimately rejects the necessity of polarization in contemporary thought, Conrad, as a representative of a previous era, did employ the traditional understanding of binary oppositions when considering international relations in 20th-century Europe: the negative images and values associated with Russia and Eastern Europe enhance the positive associations with the Western counterpart. Thus, if the Russian state wriggles in "the convulsions of a colossal body" (Conrad, 2008a, p. 60), "a possible re-grouping of European Powers" offers itself to a new Europe, and so prompts a "voice of surmise" (p. 65). It is a Europe freed from the menacing "figure out of a nightmare" (p. 54), a Europe for whose wellbeing the resurrection of the Polish state will serve as "an outpost of the Western Powers" (p. 79).<sup>21</sup>

Today, the polarization of the attractive and repellant, characteristics at opposite geographical ends, seems traditional and outdated, respectively: postmodern critics call for a neutralization of the binaries. Nowadays, neither end is to be assigned distinct features, either positive or negative. Moreover, it is not enough to replace the ends, nor to relocate the values, since, as Derrida says, "we know what always has been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately* jumping *beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither this nor that*"

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<sup>21</sup> "A Note on the Polish Problem" was delivered to the Foreign Office in 1916, that is, during WWI. Here Conrad's view on Russia's role in Europe has changed: he diminishes its role in European politics and affirms that "in reality Russia has ceased to care much for her Polish possessions" (Conrad, 2008, p. 80).

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(Derrida, 1981, p. 41). Naturally, such claims diminish the legitimacy of the traditional worldview based on the notions of polar extremes; consequently, Conrad's prose becomes problematic as it upholds such oppositions, their hierarchies, and their axiological implications; moreover, they seem to be the structural and conceptual crux of his works, particularly of those discussed above.

### **Conclusion**

Much has been written on the potential sources of Conrad's consistent picture of the world based upon the notions of virtue and fidelity to traditional rules and codes of behavior (Skolik, 2009, pp. 9–23; Najder, 2007, p. 256f, 1997, pp. 205–207); in the context of the present article, it seems worth emphasizing that in Conrad's prose, both fiction and non-fiction, the "good word" is outspoken, coherent in its message, and effective in its targeted impact on the reading public. The "good word" in non-fictional texts is, quite justifiably, different from the "good word" in Conrad's fiction, because the latter is less direct and its language is often veiled and allusive. By contrast, in his political essays the message underscoring his dissatisfaction with the authoritarian oppressor is expressed quite openly and unambiguously through stable irony, razor-sharp and finite, as well as the polarized imagery that involves a range of figures which connote decay and decomposition. As observed, the Gothic imagery helps create a vision.

However, Conrad's unrelenting outspokenness is, in my view, the reason behind the decreasing appreciation of his work today: the contemporary reader, and the wider public, is used to their views being worded in a manner that is within the delimitations of political correctness, which will not allow an expression of open contempt towards any nation, state, or race. In present-day Poland – and, arguably, in Europe as well – the interest in Conrad's prose has declined due to, in my opinion, the fact it is too straightforward and calls for radical, often heroic deeds and actions. Read with greater enthusiasm in times of oppression and crisis

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(Zabierowski, 2015, p. 189), Conrad's prose is too uncompromising with regard to European politics. A post-truth society hardly seems compatible with and is likely to be puzzled by a heroism which, along with an outspoken contempt of a totalitarian state, arguably belongs in old books.

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## The Meaning of Silence for Mastering the Practitioner's Reflective Skills

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the article is to show the meaning of practicing silence, enhancing the quality of the reflective skills of the reflective practitioner. These skills – being, speaking, disclosing, testing, and probing – reveal one's reflective competences, which require time and silence to be developed. The reflective practitioner is a person who can creatively interact with their true-self, others, the world, and God. Therefore, he or she finds time to distance themselves from many stimuli that bombard the mind and the outer environment and treats silence and quietness more as a challenge, rather than a threat to their own existence. Silence, perceived as a space for finding a new quality of one's identity, is presented in the paper in different perspectives. The meaning of listening silence is especially worth noticing in the domain of education, which is preoccupied with large streams of information coming from varied sources that demand to be acquired. That is why this goal seems important for those who must cope with matters connected with teaching, learning, upbringing, and development. I attempt to deal with this briefly in a theoretical, practically-oriented analysis by suggesting some solutions covered in the material below.

*Keywords:* silence, reflection, reflective skills, reflective practitioner, noise

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## Introduction

To show the meaning of silence in mastering the reflective skills of a reflective practitioner demands a focus first of all on understanding the terms that reveal the reflective competences of a reflective practitioner: silence, reflection, and reflective skills. These terms appear to co-exist since it is difficult to discuss them separately. Silence seen in the perspective of neurobiology, psychology, philosophy, and theology provide information about the meaning of silence in integral human development. However, time is needed to build a fruitful reflection upon oneself, others, the world, and God. This fosters the mastering of reflective skills, which enable the process of knowing one's true-self better and can be reflected in the process of consciously shaping one's own identity. The results of this process are transferred into the social area of creating a mature society. Recognizing one's role in society on the micro and macro levels helps one perform life tasks and overcome various obstacles, provided that reflection accompanies one's activities. The approach of being a reflective person seems to be a challenge nowadays, particularly because noise and hustle become more and more oppressive. Noise, as a constant factor determining our outer and inner world, spoils our peace and quiet. It bombards our senses with a huge amount of stimuli coming from different sources. Here, it is worth citing Steve Taylor, who claimed,

we spend all our time living outside ourselves, lost in the external world of activity and stimuli or in the inner world of our own thoughts. We're like a person who plans to go away for a few days but finds so much to occupy them in the place they go to that they never go home again, and never again experience the peace and contentment which lie there. This is certainly one of the reasons why so many people nowadays seem to live in a state of dissatisfaction – because they've lost touch with the natural happiness inside them. That natural happiness has been buried underneath a storm of external stimuli and what Meister Eckhart called "the storm of inward thought." (Taylor, 2020, para. 16)

Therefore, we can state that noise also penetrates deep into the educational area. Teachers and learners are more or less vulnerable to it, and become more or less resilient to silence, and, in fact, to reflection. Considering such aspects shown briefly, the idea of dealing with the issue raised in this paper seems justified and lies at the core of my interests. The theoretical analytic/synthetic method applied in the article helps build the implications that may provoke further research discussions with a practical orientation in the field of education, particularly from the personalistic perspective. The aim of the article is to exploit the meaning of practicing silence to enhance the quality of the reflective skills of a reflective practitioner and to respond to the question, What is the meaning of silence in developing the reflective skills of a reflective practitioner?

### **Silence and Its Meaning in the Life of a Person**

Discussing matters connected with silence brings about the need to look at it in two dimensions: outer and inner. The outer dimension of silence is closely connected with the external natural environment, enabling the person to hear, for example, falling drops of rain, a rushing river, singing birds, etc. It is aligned with the specific surrounding quietness, where noise coming from different sources is reduced or eliminated. The outer silence is aligned with an inner one that takes place in the internal personal environment of life. Crucially, "internal and external environments do not act independently on the individual but rather work together to shape thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (Paoletti & Ben-Soussan, 2020). In the context of silence, this thesis can suggest that outer and inner silence have a reciprocal impact on each other, which can be reflected in examples of human approaches to the self, others, the world, and God. Hence, this connection can be seen in practicing and mastering the reflective skills of a reflective practitioner, which will be demonstrated below.

Eliciting the meaning of silence for human life seen from a personalistic perspective means assuming that spirituality is the central point of the structure of one's entity, enabling one's formation and leading

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to a new, enriched identity that conditions a better personal and social life, which takes place through transformative creativity (Szymańska, 2017). It can occur when the person has a disposition for learning that determines the process of constant transformation taking place in her/his inner and outer environment. Thus, a higher level of personal, social, cultural, and spiritual identity can be achieved when the circumstances fostering human growth are set in an appropriate configuration, covering many factors, such as silence and the time necessary for reflection. Without reflection built in silence, "the knowledge obtained in the process of learning can be shaped in an instrumental, declarative way that serves the standardization goals" (Szymańska, 2020, p. 102), having nothing in common with qualitative teaching and learning. In this light, the aspect of silence appears to be crucial and cannot be ignored or neglected, especially that there is no place for it in many curricula. Moreover, notions such as "reflection" or "reflective" are often used to describe graduates, who should be equipped with reflective skills, although, in fact, the cramped curricula do not leave room for the time and silence needed to develop and master reflective skills aligned with creative ones.

Here, certain rhetorical questions come to mind: Are such aspects only slogans that many institutions overuse for their own commercial benefits? Are they the subjects of quantitative and qualitative research built on truly caring about the goodness of present and future generations? To respond to these questions, it seems justified in this world of noise to briefly analyze silence and its meaning for human development, helping society to eliminate the noise. This analysis will be shown from chosen neurobiological, psychological, social, cultural, and philosophical perspectives.

The first one can be shown thanks to Patrizio Paoletti, Tal Dotan Ben-Soussan, or Steve Taylor. Paoletti and Ben-Soussan claim that silence tends to be seen "as a means of reaching the state of consciousness without content, or, perhaps more accurately, 'with all content'" (2020). They point out that

a specific set of neurons is dedicated to silence, distinct from those that deal with sound. Silence cannot, therefore, be conceptualized

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solely as a cancellation or deletion of sound. This coincides with a fundamental principle of meditative technique, requiring practitioners to move away from rather than eliminate internal chatter, in order to move toward a non-sound, or silence. (2020)

According to Paoletti and Ben-Soussan, "silence also stimulates processes of neurogenesis in the hippocampus, which have in turn been tied to the regeneration of memories and the creation of new associations" (2020). They claim that it can be seen as "the entrance into a state of neutrality with respect to stressors, stimuli, or previous memories. The stressors do not disappear: silence is not the absence of stimuli, but a greater space that allows inner distance and thus better management of stimuli" (2020). According to the authors, this space can be presumed to be saturated with varied information provided by the senses and deepening consciousness. They also state that "silence might enhance a change in consciousness. Some of the key regions active in compassion meditation, including the insula, are involved in developing stronger than usual self and agency" (2020). Such a point of view seems to correspond to the concept of silence by Steve Taylor, who exposes it in his work in the field of psychology and spirituality (2018). In an essay entitled "The Power of Silence," he stresses the disruptive meaning of outer and inner noise merged with each other, resulting in people being prevented from meeting with their true-self, and in consequence, in spoiling a deep and rich human happiness. The author, distinguishing two dimensions of silence – the inner and outer ones – particularly directs the reader's attention to the target of inner silence, which is hard to achieve because of the huge range of information and the problems running through our minds, causing permanent inner chatter that leaves no space for silence, which could enable the development of self-consciousness, understanding what is consciousness-in-itself (2020). In this context, we can imply that silence is one of the significant factors that determines the naturally running process of achieving happiness.

The next perspective of understanding silence and its meaning can be the philosophical/theological one. Josephine Marianne Siegmund

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says that “noise is bad for the soul and that each person needs moments and spaces of silence” (2017, p. 588). Nowadays silence is frequently seen as something negative, strange, and boring, a lack of speech, failure, and particularly with the outer environment. The author states, “in reality, however, silence is not simply the expression of an absence. True silence is never just the external absence of sound or noise; true silence is a presence of attention” (2017, p. 589). She points out that “silence is constitutive of the very being of the human person. This silence is, at its root, listening – both to others, with whom one exists in communion, and to God (2017, p. 588). She pays attention to two basic features of silence – waiting and listening – that lead to the “readiness to receive the other. This readiness indicates a willingness to welcome the other in the other’s whole being” (2017, p. 590) on the path of dialogue seen as mutual comprehension deepening and transforming those in whom it takes place. The author provides the definition of listening silence. She writes that it “becomes a space for the other, and vice versa. Listening silence is a form of communication, in which the listener gives his being by receiving that of the other” (2017, p. 591). It demands that a person be a mature, attentive listener.

Silence tends to be accompanied by quiet, solitude, and sometimes loneliness. The quiet enables the person to deal constructively with work, which can be reflected in Jane Brox’s essay, “A Social and Personal History of Silence,” where she writes

I live in a quiet house. On a winter’s day, I can hear snow landing on the windowpanes and flames muttering on the stove, tires hissing on the wet street, my cats shifting in their beds. When the weather grows warm, I open the windows, and sometimes a little talk from passersby floats in. Even then, the quiet feels spacious – a place in which my thoughts can roam as I work. (2019)

Kim Haines-Eitzen, dealing with matters connected with Christianity, pays attention to the fact that solitude and loneliness are not the

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same, although they can exist together, and both can play important roles in human life, particularly in the lives of artists. She states that

solitude – being alone – has long been praised as a necessary condition for creativity. Author Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, offered an extended meditation on the writer's need for solitude. So have many poets. In their writings, May Sarton ("alone one is never lonely") and William Wordsworth ("the bliss of solitude") were especially eloquent in their praise of solitude. Poet Marianne Moore has even argued that "the cure for loneliness is solitude." (2018)

Quietness, silence, solitude, and loneliness become a challenge for our civilization, living in a world dipped in noise. Haines-Eitzen, who conducts research on early Christianity, sees the relationship between them and makes the implication that "the ancient quest for silence can perhaps teach us how to respond to the challenges of our increasingly loud world and find our own silence" (2018).

This perspective can be comprehended by reference to the material of the Carthusian Conferences entitled "The Wound of Love," where we can find that true silence is not the "one day" flower torn out as an embryo. It is the fruit ripening at the price of long and expensive procedures. First of all, it is necessary to work hard in order to keep silence, as it defies human natural dispositions. The path of silence requires time, humility, a strong yet wise will, persistence, readiness, an willingness to give up things that may disturb it, self-consciousness, concentration, and spontaneity (Konferencje Kartuskie [Carthusian Conferences], 2004, pp. 81–91). However, practicing true silence can present some dangers. Therefore, care in proceeding it is a must. Silence cannot be treated as a crucial activity of intellect and strong will that allows emotions, thoughts, and imagination to be controlled, because such an attitude toward silence makes it an artificial object of itself. Next, silence cannot be seen as end itself. Silence cannot be treated mainly as effort put into an activity that is also aimed at developing the ability of non-verbality. The Carthusian percep-

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tion of true silence exposes the fact that it takes place in the depth of a pure human heart, according to the abilities of a person responding to their will, even if it is not perfect. For them, it facilitates meeting with God in a person's heart (2004, pp. 110–112).

Entering silence can help one to understand, experience, and make progress in moving from the first room to the seventh one in an appropriate, needful order, as explained by Saint Theresa from Avilla (Szymańska, 2017, pp. 242–243). It can also foster the process of meditation and contemplation designed according to the thinking of Ignatius Loyola (Gallagher, 2015).

The brief overview of some aspects of silence that can be defined in a positive dimension as a creative space enabling a fruitful, inner-conscious meeting with one's true-self, others, and God. It has a deep educative and therapeutic meaning. It fosters true happiness shared with others in peace, love, joy, and sacrifice. Silence also enables a spiritual community to be created with God and others, while building the inner holy temple for God.

- enhancing self-consciousness
- stimulating the holistic, integral development of a person (physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual)
- integrating the inner and outer environment of human life
- facilitating the achievement of human happiness
- having a therapeutic effect
- fostering creativity
- fostering learning

In the context shown above, it is worth emphasizing that silence does not serve those who do not know if they are ready to enter it, when they are not prepared to practice it, etc. In those who associate silence mainly with solitude and who are vulnerable to the permanent outer stimuli, it can make them depressive. In such a situation, reflection upon one's own sense of life and identity appears to be a challenge.

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## **Silence Enhancing the Development of Reflective Practitioner's Skills**

Understanding silence and its functions correlates with mastering reflective skills. Dealing with this issue is connected with the term “reflection” as understood by such scientists as John Dewey, Donald A. Schön, David Boud, Rosemary Koegh, David Walker, and others mentioned by Atilla Çimer, Sabiha Odabaşı Çimer, and Gülşah Sezen Vekli (2013, pp. 133–149). In the context of this scientific paper, the definition by Joy Amulya seems to be suitable:

reflection is an active process of witnessing one's own experience in order to take a closer look at it, sometimes to direct attention to it briefly, but often to explore it in greater depth. This can be done in the midst of an activity or as an activity in itself. The key to reflection is learning how to take perspective on one's own actions and experience – in other words, to examine that experience rather than just living it. (2011)

This definition correlates with Schön's view on reflection, which embraces time and experience, providing new perspectives, enabling a more complete perception of the person in his/her emotions, feelings, beliefs, intellect, will, motives, interests, etc., and referring to knowledge by action, in action, and on action obtained during the processes of learning (Schön, 1991). These understandings of reflection can correspond to the definition of it provided from a personalistic perspective:

Reflection is the inner, active, dynamic process covering the whole integrated (biologically, psychologically, socially, culturally, and spiritually) person, revealing its quality in a particular act that arises from concrete experience taking place in a concrete period of time, and the knowledge obtained either consciously or un-consciously that needs to be formed in order to achieve personal and social growth. It is determined

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anthropologically, morally, axiologically, and psychologically.  
(Szymańska, 2017, p. 130)

Comparing the perspectives of silence with its functions and the above reflection, the common ground which covers the active, dynamic, inner processes that take place in the whole person seen as one entity seems clear. As reflection requires time and silence, I submit that reflection without silence cannot exist, and that practicing the reflective skills – being, speaking, disclosing, testing, and probing (Raelin, 2002, pp. 66–74) – requires it. I assume that its quality depends on the quality of reflective training, which enables the person to understand their true-self and others (Day, 1999, p. 229).

Therefore, starting with the first reflective skill, *being*, which shapes the metaphysical and existential dimension of the past, present, and future and enables one to look deeper into oneself from a newly re-examined moral – vertical and horizontal – perspective that forms a new understanding of experience and the theoretical/practical knowledge gained so far in the process of life-long learning. The reflective queries can become the means for locating the self in the metaphysical and existential area of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships that coexist with each other. They intervene with silence, which should be the matrix for them and other skills. Silence implies the need for a temporary distancing from oneself, others, and the issues going on in the world. Certain questions gain a new appearance from the distance that can be called creative distance: Who am I? Who are those standing by me? Where do I go and what for? What is the true meaning of my life? What is my mission in the world, my vocation? etc. These questions provide the knowledge that should be examined in relation to God, other people, and the world. When they are connected with silent meditation and contemplation, they can indicate new directions for life and can foster the creation of a brave openness for accepting things that can be rejected or seem inconvenient at first sight. Discovering them from the depth of the self “forces” a person to engage in some activities, even if they require a kind of heroism.

Practicing the skill of being is connected with the skill of *speaking*, which is crafted during silence and helps to appropriately order matters that demand to be expressed or exposed. Silence enables one to avoid using unnecessary words or posing trivial, meaningless questions. Distance, quietness, and a sense of constructive solitude can help formulate and articulate assumptions, points of view, and argumentation with an attitude of deep respect and dignity toward others and the self, which indicates the value of personalistic communication with the self, others, the world, and God. Questions – such as How well do I know my dialogue partner? Do I respect him/her? How should I conduct the narration with him/her? How do I react to my opponents? Is the dialogue creative and beneficial for both subjects? (Szymańska, 2020, p. 109) – which are built in silence, are selected in the light of personalistic metaphysical/existential perspective, regulating the emotional and intellectual commitment to many matters. This masters the next reflective skill, *disclosing*.

Disclosing, according to Raelin (2002, p. 73), may reveal the depth of human experience that can be shared in a mature way with others. Silence can help a person to make decisions on what can be disclosed during communication with others, as well as when, where, and why. Consideration of the benefits and losses should not be neglected, particularly when the truth cannot be acceptable to others, as in many cases of the lives of saints and heroes. Purity of the heart formed in silence and disclosed in the world, can be seen as an enemy, as silence is perceived by many in the world of noise. It can be understood as a key for testing oneself and others.

The reflective skill of *testing*, which Raelin describes as “an open-ended query directed toward the group as a whole that attempts to uncover new ways of thinking and behaving” (2002, p. 73) requires the previous assumptions to be explored, which can promote a process of wise collective inquiry (p. 73). This skill, mastered in silence, opens the person and society to truth about the self and the community that should be prepared for it. Each member of the community should master their own desires and points of view in order to build constructive, creative participation aimed at the true goodness of all participants. Silence can

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help reduce egoism and enhance courage in the face of aggression and many obstacles, as seen in the film *Of Gods and Men* (Beauvois, 2010). Metaphysical/existential questions appearing in the hearts of monks are tested in the space of the heart, to which no one has access. They invoke the inner activity of probing one's sense of reflective being, speaking, disclosing, and testing.

Thus, *probing* – as the fifth reflective skill – can be associated with provoking oneself to be a true witness of truth, love, faith, hope, etc. in collocation with the inner necessity of servitude aimed at building the moral ethos of society. Some questions – Where do my experience and reflection go? How do I try to change my old habits, behavior, feelings, thoughts, and motivation to be a better person? How do I help others to discover various areas of reflection? What do I do to master my personal and professional life in the aspect of the integrity of my being? (Szymańska, 2020, p. 111) – should be reflectively considered before any activities, left before distancing from them in silence, and considered thereafter leaving space for the Spirit.

All in all, I can claim that mastering reflective skills imposes the need to find time for quietness and solitude for considering different matters in the space of silence. Learning and systematically applying the methods or techniques used in practicing silence, such as meditation and contemplation, can stimulate the process of developing reflective skills, which is reflected in a piece by David Hunter entitled *Considering the Role of Silence*.

Silence is the “third speaker in a conversation” (Picard, as cited in Hunter, 2009).

Without silence, all communication would be noise with no center. Moments of silence allow time for thoughts and emotions to process.

Silence embodies a philosophy of openness to others;

A dedication to being open provides space to cultivate the whole human person.

Using reading and writing, we can experience both silence and non-silence while reflecting.

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These spaces are opportunities for critical thinking, to witness that which lies there:

Our deeper selves.

The reader has the space to understand and interpret what they have read;

The writer finds the space to reflect: Is this what I want to say?

There is more to communication and writing than just filling space;

Come to a space of silence, and then move beyond... (Hunter, 2009)

The analysis of silence, reflection, etc. raises the following questions: How are reflective skills taught and learned in schools at each step of education? Does schools' core curriculum embrace reflection and silence in the practical domain? Do schools create a space for reflective learning and for learning reflective skills? These questions can also become the subject of research that tests and probes educational policies, where the matters of reflection may be overused without referring to their real meaning. However, it is a must to remember that we cannot manipulate the silence, because it can bring consequences for us, particularly when our desires go somewhere beyond...

## **Conclusion**

The issue of the role of silence in mastering the reflective skills of a reflective practitioner can be seen as a kind of voice, calling for deeper reflection, stimulating the process of consciousness, implying the need to beware of dangers stemming from core curricula crammed with material to be taught and learned. Instrumental knowledge overload does not foster creative or critical thinking, but results in "manufacturing" minds that are eager to be manipulated in different ways. What is worse, it can disturb the process of building a sense of mature personal, social, and cultural identity, and finally – in the future – it can hinder the development of society seen from psychological, philosophical, cultural, and

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metaphysical perspectives. These implications come from the above considerations and conversations with students and teachers who cannot find the time to work with the techniques that require silence and reflection. Therefore, the following suggestions can be taken into consideration in the field of education:

- school curricula should include recommendations for practicing reflective skills through the integrated aims and content, which requires these aims to be redefined and the content to be laid out in a co-existential and integral/holistic perspective
- teachers and learners should be taught the principles and methods or techniques for constructing reflection in the horizontal and vertical dimensions
- teachers should become more professional researchers, applying the narrative methods in their work with students regardless of the subjects they teach, which may result in creative competences being mastered
- the promotion of teachers should depend on the quality of their research (based on contemporary knowledge reflected in existing knowledge), assessed qualitatively once every five years
- teachers and students should have the space and time for practicing silence
- school principals should provide teachers with real possibilities to participate in workshops and to develop their reflective skills to a high level

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# Reflections on Teaching

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## The Dimension of the Teacher-Student Relationship: Frequent Language and its Conditioning Factors

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### **Abstract**

In our paper, we approach the question of the relationship between a teacher and a student from an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates philosophical, ethical, and pedagogical knowledge. Starting from a notion of a person as being open to reality and constitutively *religated* to it, we wish to discern how to establish adequate relationships with each of the individuals existing within it. Specifically, we focus on the interpersonal dimension that can be established in a school context. As a result of this reflection, we propose a series of guidelines in relation to some linguistic expressions, to be carried out according to the student's own understanding.

*Keywords:* person, openness, language, education.

### **Introduction**

From their very essence, human beings are intimately in need of existing reality in order to be fulfilled and developed. This need – and it is a need – can be met thanks to our ability to move outside of ourselves,

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to transcend ourselves to move towards *the Other*. Understood by the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri (1963) as *religación*, it helps us to recognize that humans exist in relation to things in the form of the *world*; in relation to others in the form of *society*; in relation to tradition in the form of *history*; and in relation to the totally Other in the form of *religion*. We recognize in this a trait of human nature that contributes a specific value to the person. The synthesis of this notion of person, proposed in this article, is the result of a previous, unpublished work on the *religated* dimension of the human being.

Accepting this anthropological approach – together with the philosophical currents that support it – we consider what would be an appropriate way (the way things *should be*) to establish relationships with each of them to treat them appropriately to their nature (i.e., ethically). Specifically, we will focus on the specific recognition of the person, of their dignity, to guide the search for adequate ways of establishing relationships with “others.” Faced with this challenge, we must first delve into the capacity for openness in general and show some differences in different beings, which demand a variety of modes of relationship. We then wish to take one step further and place interpersonality within the educational context, specifically in the possible relationship dimension that is established between an educator and a learner (a teacher and a student). We will reflect on certain linguistic expressions and vocabulary used in the classroom, primarily in teachers’ rooms, personally collected over 20 years in different institutions and at different educational stages; in a way, this material is the driver for the analysis of these expressions. As a result of this work, we wish to offer some guidelines that may help in considering the individual dignity of the student and appropriately recognizing this within the context of schooling.

### **Human Beings as Open to Reality – The Question of Being**

The development of the concept of humans as beings which are open to reality has a long history. To the concept of the human being that

the Greek and Semitic world already possessed, Christianity added – in a significant way – the unique elements that were their own and that configured a new concept of humans, which is still valid to this day. As Gómez (2015) indicates, Boecio (480–525) – influenced by Aristotelian thought from eight centuries earlier – offers a classic definition of person understood as an individual substance of a rational nature. This concept – later accepted by Saint Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism – was a reference in all Christian humanism for centuries and constituted the basis of Western civilisation until the 18th century, when the process of secularizing Christian ideas came about with the advent of the Enlightenment. In the second half of the 20th century, the earlier conception of the human being was enriched by various authors, including Zubiri (1898–1983), Scheler (1874–1928), and Buber (1878–1965), as well as the dialogical and personalistic philosophical currents that added to it, although the task remains incomplete.

### **The *Religated* Dimension of Human Beings as a Constitutive Aspect of their Being**

The individual appears to us a being that moves beyond themselves, an open and transcendent being. This capacity for transcendence, understood by Zubiri (1963) as the phenomenon of *religation*, helps us recognize that human beings fulfill their existence in relation to things in the form of the world; in relation to others in the form of society; in relation to tradition in the form of history; and in relation to the completely Other in the form of religion. Only *in* and *for* this support can a person live and be; consequently, we accept the proposition that human life is made of what is real.

### **The Dimension of the Relationship with the Reality of Things: The World**

The existence or non-existence of an external world, of the reality of things, are two assumptions raised by philosophy on different occasions, from which different statements are derived. This is the case of Idealism

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and Critical Realism, which, albeit from opposite positions, refer to the outside world as a *fact* and as something that is *added* to the subject's existence. Nonetheless, Zubiri (1963) considered that "this exteriority of the world is not a simple *factum*, but the ontological structure of human beings," since it is open to them from a formal constituent. Thus, human existence is presented as an *encounter* with things, as something that gradually creates itself, in contrast to Sartre's idea (1943/1984) of the human *thrown into* existence as a solitary being. Through the complexity of living with things, with others, and with ourselves, as living beings, the person is gradually fulfilled, so this relationship's capacity becomes the fundamental characteristic that defines the person.

Unlike animals, determined by the environment to behave in a specific way according to their species, people are *open* to the world. As spiritual beings, humans enjoy independence, freedom or existential autonomy in the face of the ties and the pressure of the organic, "free before the surrounding world" (Scheler, 2000, p. 55). Humans relate to their environment, adapting symbolically, allowing us to specify the difference between animals and humans, thereby understanding humans' open path towards the construction of culture and civilization. Humans create the world.

In the first instance, this is how we present people as being dependent on external things, *relegated* to the world, while simultaneously free to decide creatively in it. It is a necessary first level of the relationship in which humans exercise a certain dominance over things, a "dominion," where the relationship is asymmetric.

### **The Constitutive Relationship with Others: Interpersonality**

In the dynamics of opening oneself to the outside – a specifically human characteristic – the individual, in addition to encountering the world, encounters the existence of other human beings. Unlike what happens with things, establishing a relationship with other people does not initially present conflict, since neither party submits to the other, but rather the encounter occurs spontaneously between peers, *between equals*. We present below the vision of several authors and significant currents on this issue, which support this thesis throughout history to the present day.

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Consequently, we can glimpse the necessary conditions for an adequate way of relating to people while respecting their own uniqueness.

When Aristotle (4th century B.C.E./1993) proposed the basic principle defining a human being as “social by nature,” he presented sociability as an aspect that springs from their own being and leads them to live in society. In this way, *the polis* becomes a vital tool for human beings, perfecting them and ordering itself to their ultimate goal: happiness. Heidegger (1927/2002), for his part, presented a dimension of *being with others* that is not justified by the mere evidence of the existence of human beings in the world who necessarily have to share the same space. According to Amengual (2016), whose first existential is *being-in-the-world* as a dynamic relationship constituted by human beings’ peculiar way of behaving concerning worldly entities, the deep and genuine meaning of *being-with-others* (*Mitsein*) unfolds from this ontological characteristic and lies in the fact that the human subject, aware of itself, is never without reference to other human subjects. Personal existence is developed and fulfilled together with other beings in the world. Along with the previous contributions on the concrete dynamism of an encounter with *the other*, we must highlight the rise of the personalist currents of the 20th century, which managed to place the *individual* at the center of every philosophical question. As a result of the reflection on the foundations of these currents, Professor Gallardo González (2016, pp. 65-70) offers some characteristics or *assumptions of the specific being of the individual*: absolute value or presence; opening or encounter; and intersubjectivity or interpersonal communion. Therefore, it can be considered that these aspects must be present in every *interpersonal* encounter and must be respected so that this encounter may be personally fulfilling.

From this personalizing perspective of an encounter, we can consequently consider some of the appropriate conditions in which any personal relationship should develop.

1. In the first place, we can refer to the *need for interaction* between people, since it is a vital need for personal development. They cannot know themselves fully by thinking, generalizing, reading, or analyzing – while

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still appreciating the possibility of transcendence and the relationships that these activities permit. The personal relationship with others confronts us with our own being, so that coexistence becomes a source for our own knowledge and that of others. We can then ask ourselves if it is sufficient for two people to live together, or to relate to one another, for this experience to be revealing – for example, in the case where they are forced to be close to one another, or in other words, the relationship is caused by mere coincidence. The answer leads us to consider that it is necessary to put freedom at stake – we can only discover who we are through our free behavior. Companionship, friendship, or a spousal relationship in which only one of the members grows and develops professionally and personally, while the other does not, cannot be considered an adequate interrelation; people have a need to grow together.

2. An *encounter* occurs when people are present in relation to each other. Things simply exist, but people are present. From this statement we can extrapolate that, on the one hand, a person's existence is an absolute way of being and having value, and on the other hand, personal presence is at the same time a way of existing in a relationship, it is being-for-someone, which is why personal presence requires *recognition* by others. This must be understood correctly: recognizing their value means discovering that they already are valuable; it doesn't mean that we make them valuable. The person is (and should be) recognized because they are valuable, because they *are* a person, not the other way around. Hence, in all cultures, greetings are of great importance, and there is a profound anthropological reason for this: they are an expression of the recognition of being in the presence of another person. Denying a greeting means ignoring someone as a person, depriving them of recognition, or reducing them to an object. María Zambrano (2007) wrote that the greatest offense that can be done to a human being is to not be heard.
3. A true encounter is only possible if there is an act of trust in the person. Believing in the person means affirming from the outset their *absolute value*. The recognition of the person is approached as *faith*

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in the person. Trust is the required condition for personal openness in dialogue on both sides, for communication. Without believing in the value of the other, there can be no interest in knowing them and there can therefore be no encounter.

4. Openness is required in order to meet in interpersonal relationships. It is an inner attitude with which the person is welcomed into one's life. The first form of openness is *acceptance*: it is not possible to know oneself without accepting oneself, nor to re-know the person as a person, without being open to them. Accepting is much more than registering someone's existence theoretically or mentally; according to Pérez-Soba, (2005) it means letting that person enter one's life, letting their existence affect one.
5. An encounter and knowledge occur through dialogical thought. This means thinking in the presence of and with another person. The essence of human relationships is located not in the participants, nor in the world in which they occur, but as Buber (1984) says, in that common *sphere* in which communication occurs, which goes beyond the scope of each participant. This dialogic situation, which goes beyond the psychological or emotional aspects, is accessible only ontologically and can be described as one of the most synergistic acts between people.

Thus we have outlined the characteristics that can be proposed as required for an *encounter* between people to be valuable, allowing us to recognize whether or not they are adequate in the various situations of daily life.

### ***Religation with the Totally Other***

Until now, we have considered human beings as beings capable of moving beyond themselves and opening up to the reality of the external world, such as things and peers.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen as a characteristic

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, we are aware that human beings are also open to history via the condition of *religation*. However, this is not developed at this time in order to focus on the interpersonal aspect that encompasses peers.

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feature that constitutes the dimension: only *in* and *through* this support can the person live and be: *religation*. Consequently, we can raise the philosophical possibility of the existence of God in reality (Zubiri, 1955), and therefore, about the ontological need for openness to the Other for full personal fulfillment. Zorroza (2018) responds by stating that regardless of the position taken, “in the face of this question of acceptance, denial, or inconsideration, it does not mean introducing a religious or theological question, but rather raising the necessary clarification about a dimension that is constitutive and that will affect its faculties” (p. 468). The question about God thus goes back to a problem with an anthropological foundation, which at this time in the present paper is left open to further investigation.

### **Education as a Place of *Encounter* Between Educator and Learner**

Humans are called to develop themselves fully, to fully become their original version; this, according to the present investigation, cannot be achieved without the help of others. As mentioned above, humans relate to each other through possibility and necessity. Thus, companionship, a willingness to relate, and self-knowledge are revealed as some of the most important aids offered to human beings. Undoubtedly, this relationship has its risks, since *opening up* to others, to the other, allows – in the words of Gallardo González (2016) – “for them to enter my life, to challenge me, and by ceasing to be indifferent and by accessing the sanctuary of my intimacy, I also give them the possibility of hurting me” (p. 34). We call this *the risk of vulnerability*.

From these assumptions, education – if it truly supposes the harmonious development of an individual’s potentialities – must necessarily occur in the sphere of the interpersonal encounter between educator and learner. We can only speak, therefore, of true *education* if it generates adequate interpersonal relationships.

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### **The School Context and Considering the Learner's Characteristic Traits**

We will now consider from the educational context – a minor portion of the broader word – the learner's characteristic traits, which create the relationships with the learner's peers and which were listed generically in the previous section of this paper. Practically everything referred to will have the same value for the educator. In this case, we will focus on the importance of the educator in terms of the presence of the learner.

#### ***The Absolute Value of the Person***

As long as the person has an absolute value and this is manifested in their absolute uniqueness, the person is presented as irreplaceable, with value in and of themselves, implying that all actions carried out must have this value as a goal, without the person being used as a medium. Therefore, the learner is a singular, unique being, there are no doubles – not even in the case of twins – and therefore, we must know each one individually. Students deserve the recognition of their peers, who accompany them in their development, thus avoiding any idea of superiority or greater "worth" between them, while it is true that *dignity* should not be confused with *functions*, which are a consequence of the position held in the educational institution or the authority received as a teacher, director, etc. Consequently, some people must be open towards others in the context of education under the right conditions, that is, *with dignity*; we must avoid reducing encounters to potential professional or personal opportunities for self-interest, which could turn people into a means to achieving something as opposed to end in and of itself.

#### ***Openness and Encounter***

The philosopher Zubiri, considers openness to others to be one of the relevant aspects of human substantivity. "The 'others' are not something added to me, but something to which I am constitutively connected" (2007, p. 61). This opening note constitutes the subject, insofar as it concerns other people. No one can be conceived as closed in on oneself, isolated and deprived of all communication; one's life finds meaning in these personal relationships.

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This respect implies the freedom for the person to express their desire to be available or not to the other, who must respect others' freedom at the same time. That is to say, it requires the expression of each individual's will to create an interpersonal bond, thus turning the encounter between two people into a voluntary encounter. A subject–subject relationship is established in an appropriate personal relationship, which exceeds that of a subject–object relationship, typical of knowledge. The key is that the level of encounter is of free wills and, therefore, at the level of equality and not dominance – which prevents openness – and whose price is a *vulnerability* in the relationship. The presence or irruption of another in one's life raises questions about life itself. This is the price that the person is willing to pay when establishing personal relationships because they know the richness that can come from interpersonality and freely want to take the risk with some people and not with others. For a learner to open up to their tutor, showing them some personal or interpersonal difficulties usually becomes a source of knowledge for the educator; however, this trust – which is conquered, not imposed – requires a lot of patience and non-judgmental listening. Here, communication presents itself as an expression of trust between two people.

### ***The Person Called to Communion***

This personal trait indicates that they are called to a common-union from their relationship of otherness, an objective to which every interpersonal encounter should tend. It shows that the absolute (the person as *being*) and the relative (“I” as a person, and “you” as a person) are given at the same time without denying themselves: singularity and relationality are two poles of personal being that come together in the free act, when the person is themselves without having to be another, and in turn, does not enclose themselves, but opens up to the other in a relationship. In this exchange, the person affirms themselves, and can reaffirm the other person if there is a true relationship with the other. In this sense, acts of love, of donation, are acts of formation and maturation of the person, who freely expands their capacity to love, to offer themselves, in such a way that the more they offer themselves, the better they are as a person.

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Education that enhances the development of the learner must tend to cultivate these two complementary dimensions of the human: the personal and the social. Growth is expected to be oriented in such a way that as personal qualities and knowledge grow, the learner also feels progressively prepared and involved in social commitment at the family, school, and societal level in a way that is appropriate to their maturity level. Coherently, good education aims to overcome the first difficulties that can be challenging for the child, such as coming out of their shells, withdrawing into themselves, or feeling more comfortable in a closed environment. Furthermore, the educator must prevent the student from generating excessive dependence on them, since the aim is to accompany them when necessary, not to supplant the will of the child or young person.

### **Communication as a Donation to the Learner**

Communication has previously been referred to as a donation that one person can make to another; we will now develop it by concretizing it in the school context as a place of the educational encounter. The main vehicle that human beings use to communicate is verbal language – despite not being the first<sup>2</sup> – as openness to the world. We paint pictures, say something to someone, and we establish a *dialogue* with the different realities present in the world. In verbal language, other aspects come into play, and to linguistic ability, such as the *degree of personal involvement* that occurs in it. Considering the different degrees of donation of the person when speaking, we can refer to a superficial or social level, a personal level, and a deep level of relationship. By *superficial* level, we refer to communication that usually occurs with people we hardly know, so it will be basic and based on an exchange of information: references to the weather, basic information to indicate whether a task has been carried out or not,

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<sup>2</sup> Prior to verbal language, we find the unarticulated sounds of a newborn in the form of gurgling or babbling, as well as expressions typical of childhood, such as crying and smiling, a way of communicating.

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etiquette and politeness, etc. By *personal level*, we mean the type of exchange that takes place between friends, family members, etc., in which, in addition to information, the sharing of opinions, dreams, concerns, etc. is quite common. Finally, a much deeper, more intimate communication can be established, in which the person offers themselves to the other, as can happen in a confidential dialogue between close friends, in a romantic relationship, etc. In-depth communication can become one of the best means of establishing adequate relationships between people, and the objective is for this type of communication to ensure that the relationship goes beyond its starting point.

The analysis of the type of conversations that take place in the family or in an educational institution can give us a clear idea of what level of communication we are at and, therefore, what the relationship that we are establishing in those areas is. It may be inappropriate for a family not to exceed the superficial level of communication, or for there to not have been a deep or personal conversation at some point with a co-worker, or between a teacher and a learner, after years spent in an educational institution. Undoubtedly, we need to make an effort when we wish to raise the level of a relationship and, among other things, to reserve time and create favorable contexts for this type of communication to occur.

### **Linguistic Expressions and Vocabulary as a Means of Recognizing the *Being* of the Learner or Educational Conditioning Factor**

After studying communication as a means of promoting interpersonal encounters, we will now focus the presentation on the brief and concise analysis of some expressions and vocabulary used by educators. These have been personally selected from among those that I have heard most frequently in my educational journey over the last twenty years. They occurred in various educational stages and turned out to be a driver in the development of this research. We will refer to the use of terms used individually by the educator in the classroom and other places, especially the teachers' room. We agree to consider that language conditions thought and, therefore, linguistic as well as psychological and affective issues are mixed into the way we express ourselves.

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### ***Singularized Expressions Versus Generalizations***

A specific singularity of a human being which makes them different from other beings is that of *educability*. This quality of humans that summarizes their ability to learn becomes a reinforcement for the educator, since they know that the nature of the learner is positioned in their favor due to the natural predisposition to be educated. From this it follows, in the words of Domínguez (2007), that we cannot say what the learner is, but rather what they are being, since the learner is a being *in fieri* and, therefore, they can change. Sometimes this ability to change is obscured, for example by such the intensity of an acquired vice or bad habit, advanced age, etc.

The use of labels or adjectives frequently associated with the same learner (smart, lazy, capable, incapable, etc.) is contradictory, as well as the generalizations that refer to what the person *is* and not to what the person *is currently being*, as this may change the following day. For example, it would be convenient to modify or replace the frequent expression “you are lazy” or “they are lazy” with something more objective: “This is the third day this week that you haven’t done your homework, you’re behaving like a lazy person.”

Going a little further, we should add the convenience of using only terms related to the educational world which can help with more objective evaluations. For example, it’s common to hear in evaluations and teacher meetings expressions such as “She’s very nice,” “He’s a bore,” or “She’s not a trouble-maker in class.” However, none of these expressions – just to name a few – appear in the evaluation criteria for an area or subject, and moreover, they can diminish the objectivity regarding the learner’s behavior according to the teacher’s sensitivity. The vocabulary could be adjusted more specifically in relation to observable events: “If a classmate asks him for a favor, he usually says yes,” “She is polite,” “He makes an effort to ask questions afterwards,” “She hits her classmates in secret,” “He doesn’t speak in class during explanations – therefore, he doesn’t interrupt – nor does he ask or intervene when it is time to do so,” etc. As can be seen, all these references are specific, can become more positive over time, and in no way condition the person’s being, although we cannot deny

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the importance of the acquisition of habits (virtues/vices). Thus, greater respect for the learner's dignity is considered since we avoid closing doors to the possibility of real change in the learner.

### ***Positive Language Versus Disqualification***

Destroying is very simple; constructing is not so simple. The person is called to apply themselves, to "go beyond" (Domínguez, 2007, p. 9); however, the effort is valued little, and on occasion we find learners who seem to have already reached their limit despite their young age. The expressions "No one can handle him" or "She's hopeless" can often be heard in nurseries or high school meetings. Some educators, such as Morales (2011), are convinced that a hero sleeps inside each young person and that the purpose of education is to awaken them:

Only on the basis of not being afraid to demand a lot, and of not getting tired of always insisting, is the young person able to climb the three steps that the perfect education entails. It is about trusting the person – despite the negative appearances that would lead us to abandon the educational effort – and trusting their possibilities; counting on their freedom to be realistic. He doesn't want to today, maybe tomorrow he will. Trusting the person and being available, accessible, gathering the required patience mentioned above. Expressions such as "It seems that now you do not want to talk-collaborate-rectify and I respect that; if you change your mind later I am here to help you." We could examine a number of positive or negative expressions in a teachers' meeting, whether the comments were constructive or non-constructive, what the general view of the learners is according to the vocabulary we use, etc.

### ***Silence, Listening, and Greeting***

As the last element to consider in this section on expressions of the educational reality that can help to better consider the unique dignity of the student, we propose an educational element that is frequently

forgotten: silence, referring to the educator's ability to keep silent when appropriate, as well as an expression of respect. This has nothing to do with complicit silences or those resulting from malaise. Rather, we are referring to silence as opportunity, as prudence. Educating is about striking a difficult balance – nobody said it would be easy – given the richness and weakness of the person. It can be a short amount of time in which the value of each person is considered, and therefore the child is attended to and listened to on the playground, or an adolescent who expresses their anger or something that interests them – even though the learner may have difficulty realizing their interest in the subject in question. It helps to look at how the person is being attended to at that time, if other matters are postponed and attention is focused, if a phone call is happening at the same time, if the current task at hand is not interrupted, if appointments are postponed, etc. Working on active listening can be a training topic for educators and, above all, its practice can be a concrete way of respecting the learner, knowing that it is convenient to manage the time available realistically.

Greetings should be basic and simple: they are not merely a demonstration of courtesy or good manners, they are also a way of showing the other that we have made ourselves present for them, with all that that entails for the other person, as explained above. The tone of the greeting should be basic and simple when dealing with the recognition of others, since it is not only a measure of courtesy or good manners, but a way of showing others that we have made ourselves present to them, as has already been explained, that we recognize them and we connect with them with our presence, as opposed to ignoring them.

## **Conclusion**

After having mentioned authors who support the notion of a person as a being who is open to reality, we consider that this approach sheds some light on how to establish relationships with different beings and to conduct them conveniently. We have focused on interpersonal

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that is, on relationships between human beings, between peers, although the appropriate modes of relationship have not been exhaustively analyzed here.

With a certain clarity about who we are, we feel more confident in knowing where to go and how to guide education. In the educational context, this conviction leads us to conclude that a quality education – so often proclaimed – can only be one that responds to what the person is and is called to be. In this research we have considered some expressions that take place in the communication of educational encounters and we conclude by stating that they affect the recognition of the person, specifically, the learner. With the desire to contribute to the better recognition of students' being, we have offered some concrete aspects, such as the use or not of generalizations, positive vocabulary, and expressions of trust giving opportunities, silence, or greeting, which can be taken as guidelines to deepen education through respect for others. It is apparently a simple task, and one readily available to educators and schools without the need for vast resources, yet it is also complex due to habits to the contrary and due to the lack, on occasion, of the deep recognition of the value of the person.

In turn, the necessary provisions to be able to assume the appropriate ways in relation to treatment and interaction with students may require training in aspects such as deepening the knowledge of human nature or active listening, among other things. We believe our reflection can offer a proposal that is specific for teachers and well-founded in our opinion, while simultaneously rich in possibilities – like people themselves – when establishing interpersonal relationships.

Finally, we conclude by highlighting that throughout the paper we have delved into aspects that were only touched on above and that may constitute new research opportunities. This includes the importance of the *presence* of other people, which connects with us and which does not ignore us. Our recognition of this presence is important in understanding the value of *being*, and this is not something arbitrary or that can be freely chosen: we need one another for our own development. It is human nature.

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## Teachers' Collective Efficacy as a Predictor of Students' Academic Performance in North Central Nigeria

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### Abstract

Public secondary schools in Nigeria occupy a significant position for providing qualitative education, yet there has been increasing public discontent with the quality of students being produced in the country's public secondary schools. Teachers are regarded as one of the resources necessary for achieving the goals of secondary education. It is against this backdrop that this study examined teachers' collective efficacy as a predictor of students' academic performance in North Central Nigeria. Three research questions and hypotheses were generated to guide the study, which made use of a correlation-type descriptive research design with a population consisting of all teachers in the North Central region. An instrument titled the Teachers'

Collective Efficacy Questionnaire (TCEQ) was developed to elicit pertinent data from the participants. Also, students' academic achievement was measured. The results of the study revealed that no substantial nexus existed between the teachers' experience and the students' academic achievement. However, the teachers' verbal encouragement was found to be an important predictor of the learners' academic success. Similarly, the teachers' academic emphasis was a significant predictor of the learners' academic performance. Based on this, it was established that teachers' collective efficacy is an important predictor that can be used to improve students' academic achievement. The study recommended that education administrators should acquaint their staff with the importance of collective efficacy towards improving students' academic performance. It was also recommended that the government should organize workshops, seminars, and conferences for the supervisors, principals, and teachers of schools on efficacy issues and that teachers should be well motivated to maintain a high degree of efficacy in their various schools.

*Keywords:* collective efficacy, senior secondary schools, academic performance

## **Introduction**

Education remains a fundamental tool for overhauling national advancement. It requires special attention because it transmits the sociopolitical and cultural transformation of the people. Regardless of the natural bequest of a country's strength, deprived of its essential scholastic capability, the talents required to develop the country would be missing, and consequently, such a society would be inevitably deficient. Education remains the backbone and determinant of technological, political, and socioeconomic improvement of countries, and has contributed greatly to the knowledge acquisition and skill development of millions of people around the world (Buonomo et al., 2020; Ileonikhena, 2015; Oweh, 2014). Manpower development is a prerequisite for national advancement through education so as to produce the necessary proficient

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workforce of sufficient value and capacity. A cultured and experienced nation which possesses the information, abilities, and skills required for effective involvement in civic life add value to our democracy, supporting the common good and ensuring that future generations benefit from their labors. To achieve these objectives, there is a need for teachers ready to assist the students and the school (Burns & Carpenter, 2008; Fasasi, 2011; Wilson et al., 2020).

There is public dissatisfaction regarding students' performance on both internal and external examinations and the state in which students are graduating from secondary schools, lacking the basic skills required for effective functioning in society. Moreover, the performance of public secondary school students on the West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) exam has made parents confused, examiners worried, the government embarrassed, and the students dazed because it is quiet below their expectation (Akwara, 2017). Thus, there has been increasingly public discontent in Nigeria over the quality of the students being produced in public senior secondary schools. Teachers and administrators of public secondary schools are under more pressure today than ever before to be more productive while performing the duties officially assigned to them as teachers and administrators. Their level of collaboration while at work could also go a long way in determining the effectiveness of their schools. Teachers' job performance affects the performance of students on examinations. How can teacher quality best be ensured if not through collaboration and consideration of teamwork? Poorly trained and unmotivated teachers, low student academic achievement, poor attendance, high dropout rates, low scores in public examinations, and a poor foundation for education, are some of the indicator of the poor quality of education in Nigeria. These have provoked the demand for a positive transformation of the education system in Nigeria (Lawal, 2015; Orimoloye, 2018).

A declining and deteriorating Nigerian education system was inherited from the colonial administration, a lack of strategic support from the Nigerian society, an increase in enrolment, and a decrease in funding for the system, thus militating against achieving the nation's goals

for secondary school as stated in the nation's educational policy (Okonjo et al., 2015; Wasagu, 2018). Consequently, secondary school transformation has raised deep concern and has attracted the interest of educational stakeholders in scholastic inquiry in order to achieve an encouraging performance. Education in the modern era has turned out to be a challenge in which educators and managers are closely examined for learners' performance. Regarding mastery of the subject matter, numerous educators are unproductive and inadequately trained to pass on useful information (knowledge and skills) to their students. Students' academic performance continues to fall as a result of a lack of commitment, an inability to deliver selfless services, a lack of self-trust, and an inability to work with others towards achieving certain goals (Cansoy et al., 2020; Freeman, 2018). The future success of the nation's educational system hinges on teachers' confidence in instructional delivery enhancing academic standards. Teachers' effectiveness is a fundamental determinant of students' accomplishment (Goddard et al., 2020; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ross & Bruce, 2017).

It is apparent that secondary school education plays an important role in national development. Apart from acting as the link between elementary schools and institutions of higher learning, it offers a chance for students to acquire extra knowledge, talents, qualities beyond the basic level. The development of education at a post-elementary level of in Nigeria is required because education being provided at the primary level appears to be inherently deficient for the acquisition of long-term literacy and numerical competence. As a result, it needs to be catered to adequately. The evidence to this effect includes dropout rates due to an inability to comprehend, public dissatisfaction with students' performance on both internal and external examinations, and the state in which graduates are being produced, lacking the required talents for effective functioning in society. It is against this background that the researchers investigate teachers' collective efficacy as predictor of students' academic performance in North Central Nigeria.

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## Literature Review

Klem and Connell (2014) found that the greatest influential determinant of students' academic achievement is teachers' collective obligation, because it promotes students' commitment and learning. Collective efficacy entails school qualities in terms of teamwork, which assumes accountability for student learning outcomes. Individual members have confidence in one another in regards to achieving the predetermined objectives. Ware and Kitsantas (2017) established that a college workforce with great degree of observed effectiveness set themselves challenging and valuable goals that provoke a persistent determination to achieve them. Educational institutions are seen as a scholarship environment where individual members and the institution in general set objectives, select diverse learning activities, respect and embrace different members' roles, develop in-depth knowledge of ideas, and provide feedback. Teachers' mode of action is sophisticated in these learning settings, in that they are confident of the feedback which consequently contributes toward effective decision-making processes in education.

Collective efficacy is a potential that can be used to assess the degree of institution variability and to reveal a school's shared ideology in its capacity to positively influence learners' competencies to achieve a common goal. It not only implies an individual belief system or organizational construct, which collective efficacy researchers identify as promoting or increasing school capacity, but also an evolving group-degree feature, which is the merchandise of collaborative subtleties (Darrington & Angelle, 2013). Regarding students' success, school philosophies on shared instructional effectiveness contribute considerably to learners' performance. Collective efficacy connotes assessment of teachers in the school system, which the school in totality establishes and implements in the sequences of action that are essential for better academic output (Freeman, 2008; Goddard et al., 2014).

Collective efficacy is great if instructors are of the opinion that they are skilled at facilitating students to grasp intricate content, nurturing learners' creativity, and improving students' academic achievement.

If their efficiency is great, teachers display more perseverance and enthusiasm toward innovative instructional methods. Teachers with great efficiency inspire independence in students, cater meticulously to the needs of learners that are not effectively increasing, and are capable of transforming learners' sensitivities toward educational capabilities (Ash-ton & Webb, 2016; Eells, 2011; Lashinsky, 2012; Ross & Bruce, 2017). Bandura (2013) established that collective efficacy and student achievement are stronger than the correlation between socioeconomic status and student achievement. Recently, collective efficacy has been rated as a fundamental element that influences student academic performance. A meta-analysis established that collective efficacy and student attainment were powerfully linked with each other. Therefore, collective is an important predictor of student academic success. Zhou et al. (2020) established a correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and students' academic achievement in computer science in high school and concluded that efficacy displayed by teachers in the classroom influenced academic success of their students. Cansoy et al. (2020) assessed the link between instructional leadership and teacher commitment in secondary schools and concluded that efficacy is a significant factor that can be used to establish a balanced relationship between instructional leadership and the commitment of teachers.

Tschannen et al. (2018) confirmed the potentiality of teacher effectiveness as a degree of educator trust capable of influencing student achievement, teachers' belief, and confidence. The construct of teachers' sense of efficacy connotes teachers' position on specific expectation that support students' learning. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy belief are capable of enhancing students' performance. Dellinger et al. (2018) remarked that teacher efficacy in the framework of schools' ability performs exact teaching tasks at a specified level of quality in a specified situation. Teacher effectiveness has been connected to numerous results and professional behaviors, including perseverance in working with problematic students, an advanced degree of organization and classroom preparation, being less critical of students, and demonstrating persistence and resilience when things do not go well.

Another study on efficacy found that effective educators are needed to ensure robust and reliable classroom time management within an academic year (Darling & Hammond, 2018). Students' behavioral management is manifested via this factor. The basic philosophies for learning and character formation are transferred to the students through teachers that are of the view that standards should be maintained in the teaching and learning process, which will allow the students to function assertively within the paradigms of a conducive atmosphere deprived of the distress of punishment from peers or embarrassment due to prejudicial measures. Regarding the students and the curriculum, effective teachers take a vigorous method of teaching, as learning is globally linked (Lee, 2012; Ware, 2012). To culminate their learning capability, books are published by students on their difficulties with illustrations and pictures as an additional result. Toliver's successful engagement with her students became apparent when one group of students made the following comment in their book: the purpose of this experience is to prove that the classroom is not the only place to learn math (Toliver & Ware, 2016). The studies of Barkley (2016) and Schunk (2019) confirmed that triumphant arrangement with students displayed the additional active and instructional technique of effective teachers, supportive teaching, and learning. In supportive learning settings, students work together rather than compete against one another. Appropriate arrangements of the learning setting offer students the prospect of feeling effective, consequently increasing the students' effectiveness. Through the use of supportive learning paradigms, the learning responsibility is conveyed to the students. Teachers significantly influence students' academic achievement with dedicated responsiveness to their numerous learning approaches and capabilities. Learning styles ought not to be seen as interruptions, but as a mechanism for providing a vibrant link and a preeminent technique to productively prepare students. Teaching in ways that connect with students requires an understanding of the differences that may arise from culture, family experiences, intelligence, and approaches to learning.

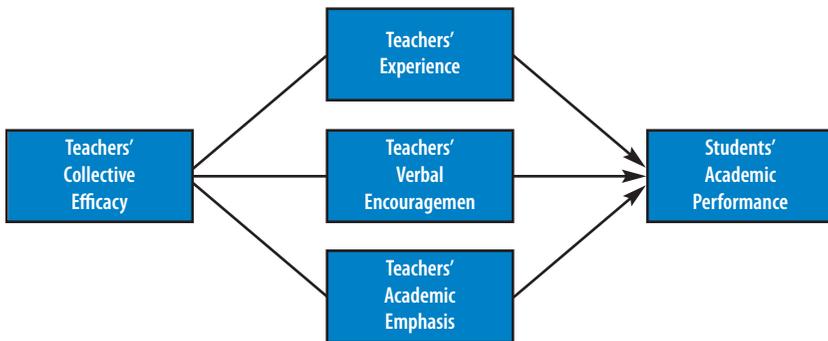
Hardy et al. (2015) investigated the effect of incentive self-talk on self-efficacy. The findings showed that both instructional and motivational

self-talk were evidently linked to self-efficacy and performance, but none of the dimensions was connected to performance. Goltosi and Zourbanos (2018) examined the effect of involvement and efficacy on secondary school students' effectiveness in Wuhan, China. The study used a longitudinal approach and the results of the study showed that the use of incentive self-talk considerably improved self-efficacy and the achievement of secondary school students, therefore providing supporting evidence for the intervening role of self-efficacy. Also, Markaki (2014) reported on the effects of instructional self-talk on the learning of communication skills among female students in a Korean school of language and communication skills. The researcher found that the self-talk group revealed better performance and reported increased self-efficiency than a control group. Robbert et al. (2019) conducted a study on anticipation and performance. A factorial research design was adopted for the study. The 30 male and 30 female subjects were randomly selected with either a high or low self-efficacy condition. The outcomes of the study showed that a significant positive difference existed between the high and low self-efficacy subjects as well as between men and women. The study recommended that a different pattern of gender role in socialization should be given priority. The work of Nichola et al. (2015) focused on the relationship between general self-efficacy, planning for the future, and life satisfaction. The study group consisted of 243 university students ranging in age from 16 to 31 years. Data were collected through the New General Self-Efficacy Scale Questionnaire, the Continuous Planning Scale Questionnaire, the Consideration of Future Consequence Scale Questionnaire, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale Questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that all variables are connected with self-efficacy.

Additionally, the present study is anchored on self-efficacy theory, which was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977 and is premised on an individual's belief in their capacity to implement behavior and to perform the tasks necessary to accomplish a specific performance. The fundamental belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance, accomplishment, and emotional wellbeing. According to Bandura, the theory of the two fundamental determining factors of behavior are apparent

self-efficacy and result expectation. The second paradigm denotes the perceived positive and negative consequences of performing the behavior. The individual's self-persuasion through self-talk and enhanced the achievement of certain outcomes. People who have confidence in their capability to produce the desired outcomes through their arrangements, have little motivation to embark on events or endure in the face of adversity. Whatever other issues that act as guides and stimuli are rooted in the core belief that one can make a difference by one's action (Wiley, 2014). Based on the above-mentioned studies, the present one is aimed at assessing teachers' collective efficacy using three dimensions (experience, verbal encouragement, and academic emphasis). The conceptual framework of the study is given in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study**



### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between teachers' experience and students' academic performance?
2. What is the nexus between teachers' verbal encouragement and students' academic performance?
3. Is there any relationship between teachers' academic emphasis and students' academic performance?

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### Research Hypotheses

- H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between teachers' experience and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.
- H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between teachers' verbal encouragement and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.
- H0<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between teachers' academic emphasis and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.

### Methodology

The research design used for the study is a quantitative survey. The study population was comprised of all teachers of senior secondary school in the secondary schools in the North Central states (Kwara, Niger, Kogi, Plateau, Nassarawa, and Benue) of Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique was used to select three states (Kwara, Kogi, and Nassarawa) out of the six states in the geopolitical zone, while a multistage sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 375, based on Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table. An instrument titled the Collective Efficacy Questionnaire was designed to elicit relevant information from the respondents. The instrument was subjected to a validity check by giving it to experts in Educational Management and Test and Measurement at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria for their opinions concerning the items that are contained within the instrument. Likewise, the reliability of the instrument was checked via a pilot study with 50 teachers that were selected from outside the three states used for the main study. The data collected were found to have Cronbach's alphas of 0.86 (teachers' experience), 0.92 (teachers' verbal encouragement), and 0.85 (teachers' academic emphasis). Additionally, students' results in English and Mathematics were obtained from the schools to measure students' academic performance.

Questionnaires were administered to respondents in the three selected states. Before administering the questionnaires, permission was sought from the schools' principals on the need to conduct research that focused on teachers' collective efficacy as predictors of academic performance. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered in the study.

### Data Analysis

*H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of teachers' experience and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.*

**Table 1: Relationship between the level of teachers' experience and students' academic performance**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-value	p-value	Decision
Teachers' Experience	368	14.05	2.74	379	0.021	0.688	H0 <sub>1</sub> accepted
Academic Performance	368	50.82	14.79				

Table 1 shows the calculated *r*-value (0.021) and *p*-value (0.688), the latter of which was found to be greater than the significance level (0.05). Thus, the stated null hypothesis was upheld. This result therefore suggests that there was no significant relationship between the level of teachers' experience and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.

*H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of teachers' verbal encouragement and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.*

**Table 2: Relationship between the level of teachers’ verbal encouragement and students’ academic performance**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-value	p-value	Decision
Teachers’ Verbal Encouragement	368	16.03	2.78	379	0.141	0.010	H <sub>0</sub> ; rejected
Academic Performance	368	50.82	14.79				

Table 2 shows the calculated *r*-value (0.131) and *p*-value (0.010), the latter of which was found to be less than the significance level (0.05). Thus, the stated hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers’ verbal encouragement and students’ academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.

*H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the level of teachers’ academic emphasis and students’ academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.*

**Table 3: Relationship between teachers’ academic emphasis and students’ academic performance**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-value	p-value	Decision
Teachers’ Academic Emphasis	368	17.13	2.80	379	0.138	0.007	H <sub>0</sub> ; rejected
Academic Performance	368	50.82	14.79				

Table 3 shows the calculated *r*-value (0.138) and *p*-value (0.007), the latter of which was found to be less than the significance level (0.05). Thus, the stated hypothesis is rejected. This result therefore suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers’ academic emphasis and students’ academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.

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## Discussion

The findings from the study reveal that there was no significant relationship between the level of teachers' experience and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. Thus, the stated null hypothesis was not rejected. This does not mean that, teacher's experience is not relevant. In fact, there is a common saying that "experience is the best teacher" – through experiences, a great deal of knowledge, skills, and values are learned. The school administrators and teachers become expert as a result of accumulated experiences. Lashisky (2012) affirmed that teachers are dominant in any supportable transformation in the school system. Cooper (2012) argued that a skillful, successful execution of a particular duty leads to success. Therefore, encouraging performances boost teachers' efficiency in teaching and the writing skills of students. Successful experiences serve to increase self-efficacy beliefs and lead to expectations of success in future performances. He buttressed his point further, claiming that if one fails in performing a task, self-efficacy beliefs may be diminished, leading one to question the likelihood of success in future performances. Additionally, Cooper (2012) illustrated that when a first-year math teacher is able to observe an expert math teacher successfully teach a difficult concept to students, the observation will positively enhance the young teacher's future sense of efficacy in teaching the difficult concept. Experiences must provide observational learning opportunities that are purposeful, constructive, interactive, and motivational in order to be effective.

There was a significant relationship between teachers' verbal encouragement and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. Thus, the stated null hypothesis was rejected. Verbal encouragement has a significant effect on the academic performance of students in senior secondary schools. Even though the relationship between verbal encouragement and academic performance in this study can be considered a weak correlation based on the correlation values that were established, which indicates a rather small effect size, it can still be concluded that verbal encouragement

boosts the performance of students in school. This finding is in agreement with a study by Tenaw (2013), who found that verbal encouragement convinced individuals – who may doubt their capabilities – that they possess the skills needed for success at a given task. He explained further that, in education, verbal encouragement delivered by teachers often takes the form of verbal feedback and evaluation. Encouragement must be realistic, sincere, and from a credible source; otherwise it can negatively affect student.

There was a significant relationship between teachers' academic emphasis and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. Thus, the stated null hypothesis was rejected. The relationship between the two variables can be considered a weak correlation in view of the correlation values that were displayed in Table 3, which shows a rather small effect size. However, it can be established that teachers' academic emphasis is a predictor of students' academic success in school. This finding supports a study by Olivo (2015) which concluded that the rate of teachers' inculcation on learners' commitment and dedication to their students significantly enhance students' learning outcomes. The current finding is in agreement with the theory of self-efficacy, which is based on the assertion that an individual's belief in their capacity to implement behavior and perform tasks is necessary to accomplish a specific performance. The fundamental point in efficacy theory, as postulated by Bandura, is the foundation of human performance, motivation, accomplishment, and emotional wellbeing, which reflects confidence in the capacity to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. According to Bandura, the main determining factors of behavior are perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectation (as cited in Wiley, 2014). Taking the above findings together, it can be said that teachers' verbal encouragement and emphasis are important predictors of students' academic performance. Even though teachers' experience failed to predict the academic success of students, this study has nonetheless managed to provide answers to the three research objectives stated for the study.

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## **Conclusion**

Secondary school reform continues to attract the interest of stakeholders in education toward achieving outstanding performance in both internal and external examinations. Education in the modern era has turned out to be a great incentive game, where tutors and managers are comparable and seriously examined for learner accomplishment. The educational advancement of the learners' depends on the teachers' characteristics, learning environment, and quality of learning in the school system. The disparity in achievement gaps were attributed to principal leadership style, a high level of student expectation, orderly and structured classrooms, and teachers' commitment to monitoring student progress. Thus, the quality of education contributes to achievement by setting challenging goals, providing pleasant learning environments, working hard towards academic excellence, and respecting and acknowledging achievement.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Synergy must be established among the relevant stakeholders in secondary education on strategies to put in place that would enhance the academic standard of secondary school students.
2. The government at the federal, state, and local levels should organize workshops, seminars, and conferences for the supervisors, principals, and teachers of public senior secondary schools on collective efficacy issues.
3. A conducive learning environment must be made available for effective learning and for learning to be actualized in secondary schools.
4. School management boards should assess the level of teachers' compliance with the implementation of collective efficacy issues through an effective supervisory technique.

5. Training and retraining of teachers on self-confidence should be organized for teachers from time to time.

### **Suggestion For Future Research**

Since the current study established teachers' experience as a non-predictor of students' academic performance, additional studies are needed to use teachers' academic qualifications to predict academic performance, because the qualifications of teachers are regarded as an important factor that can be used to assess teachers' competence and coordination in classroom. In the same vein, since a significant relationship exists between teachers' academic emphasis and academic performance, teachers' experience could be used as a potential moderating variable that can be used to strengthen the nexus between emphasis and performance. Future studies could employ teachers' experience to serve as a mediating variable that can be used to establish a link between teachers' qualification and effectiveness. Additionally, studies are needed to focus on highly experienced teachers as a variable that can be used for students' efficiency and effectiveness. Lastly, interviews on predictors of students' success are needed to confirm or invalidate the present findings.

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## Developing Critical Thinking in the Next Generation of Teachers at Universities: A Comparative Research Study Conducted in Slovakia

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### **Abstract**

The world of education has changed. Information is available anywhere and at any time. It can be daunting to understand and assess it and to distinguish a hoax from objective reality. The training of future teachers at universities needs to be changed so that a graduate from a Faculty of Education will become a professional capable of teaching others how to learn. Teachers can no longer only transmit information and evaluate how students acquire it. They should make learning meaningful and guide learners toward critical thinking. The underlying assumption is that they themselves can think critically. The aim of the study is to compare the level of critical thinking in university students between two generations of students, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z (the iGeneration).

*Keywords:* critical thinking, teacher training, future generation

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## Introduction

Teaching is the free choice to continuously work on oneself, a choice of lifelong learning and self-education. Teachers today cannot be satisfied with what is gained by graduating from a Faculty of Education. They should show interest in the latest findings in scholarship and technology. Teachers today cannot afford to rest on their laurels and be content with the fact that “the world has gone mad” and then continue to work as before. They must reflect on what is pulsating in the world, in society, and on social networks, too. The school must not close itself inside a cocoon and isolate itself from real life and current social topics. All those who are being educated (children, pupils, students, young people, adults, and seniors) live in two worlds: the real world and a virtual world. We live in an era when it is no longer possible to remain and function in only one of them. It is important to have an overview of events taking place in both reality and in virtual space. Although automation is making our lives easier and saves time, these time reserves often vanish when searching and surfing, preparing for the work of an educator, be it in the form of teaching, lectures, advising, creative activities, or others. The speed and dynamics of the change are unrelenting. The flow of information in the business sector is unbelievably fast. That which was true yesterday is no longer valid today, or it needs an *upgrade*. The business sector must react rapidly and flexibly to customer requests and the demands of the market and must present original ideas and solutions. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about school and teaching. Present-day schools are unable to respond flexibly to the changing world, the new generation of children and students, or new trends in education. Only with difficulty can it throw off the shackles of conservative and transmissive teaching. The transfer of research findings from the field of neuroscience and psychodidactics into the didactics of teaching is a long process. Neuroscientific research has made progress in recent decades and at present it is essential to turn to neuroscientists to clarify the laws of human cognition, because the world of education has been altered by the determination of these changes in society.

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In January 2015, an internationally connected group of intellectuals published a document titled *Manifesto 15*. The authors and signatories of this document, by means of its twelve points, formulated an image of the radical transformation needed in education. They do not only claim that education systems must change. In many points they point out that things have already changed and that there is no going back. The motivation for preparing *Manifesto 15* was the fact that even though it has long been clear that the current educational model based on education by obedience is no longer sustainable, almost nothing is happening to redress this disparity. Transformations in practices at schools are minimal and politicians refuse to take note of the necessary changes. One of the points of *Manifesto 15* is that the future is already here, but is distributed unevenly over different places of social life and the education system. Many schools and teachers are already teaching according to the new paradigm, but a large portion of school systems reject any changes. The key slogan of *Manifesto 15* is “The school of generation 1.0 cannot teach the children of generation 3.0. Thus, a school set to the demands of 18th- and 19th-century society is incapable of preparing children for life in the 21st century” (Feřtek, 2015, p. 19). The questions then arise of whether the quality of the training of future teachers at universities has changed and whether it reflects the fact that the future generation of teachers will be working with completely different people/students than before.

At present, when access to knowledge is easier than ever before and new information is available almost immediately, there is talk of the so-called meta-skills that will be essential to acquire in education and to develop over the lifespan. So, what should we be teaching? Many pedagogical experts argue that schools should switch to teaching “the four Cs” – critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. More broadly, they believe that schools should downplay technical skills and should emphasize general-purpose life skills. Most important of all will be the ability to deal with change – to learn new things and to preserve one’s mental balance in unfamiliar situations. To keep up with the world of 2050, one will have to do more than merely invent new ideas and products; above all, people will reinvent themselves again and again (Harrari, 2018).

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Critical thinking is a stronger predictor of real-world outcomes than intelligence (Butler et al., 2017).

### **The Level of Critical Thinking in Future Teachers Compared With the Previous Generation**

Different people are born and raised in different conditions. William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of several books on generational cycles in America, are also known for labelling the generation of people born between 1980 and 1995 as Generation Y, or Millennials (Horovitz, 2012). This generation of Millennials, which grew up with digital technologies and at a time when social media was being developed, is currently establishing itself on the job market. These are people who can be online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. What has influenced this generation the most is technological progress. They have technologies in their genes and Generation Y completely identifies with the arrival of iPhones, laptops, and tablets (Buchtík, as cited in Koníčková, 2020). No other generation has been offered so many opportunities for good education, studying abroad, and travelling around the world. Perhaps this is why Generation Y is self-confident, ambitious, fluent in foreign languages, and focused on performance. They have high expectations from their employers. These people long for meaningful projects. When necessary, they don't even distinguish between working hours and leisure time. Members of Generation Y like working in a team, but require a team leader. Millennials are pragmatic and capable of multitasking, but they are less interested in politics and the environment than any generation before them. Generation Y does not have a problem working overtime, as long as it is properly rewarded. This generation is interested in perspective and growth. They ask more questions and don't immediately nod in approval when doing a job. Work is not everything for them, though; they work so that they can have fun. Their job expectations are sometimes unrealistic. They do not call on the telephone; they use various software applications for communication. They express a lifestyle through food. Given their unrestricted access

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to information, they have a tendency to be assertive and hold strong opinions. They are not true to values and their flexibility is influenced by the speed of the internet (Skalická, 2018).

Generation Z, also known as the iGeneration and consisting of people born between 1996 and 2009, is currently studying at high schools and universities. The exact boundaries defining this generation are not yet set. According to demographers, it should be from the mid-1990s to the first years of the 21st century. What is significant for this generation is the extensive use of internet technologies. They begin with them from a very early age, and so members of Generation Z are identified with technology and interactions on online social networks, which represent a significant part of their social life. Their interests extend beyond family and state borders, to the world of technology and multitasking, without geographical limits. We have here an online generation that has never experienced a world without the internet, a world of continuous updates. They have excessively caring parents who make decisions for their children that should be left to them. Therefore, they feel the need, for example, to consult with their community on a social network about a job offer. They are more than saturated with brand names. They are focused on the whole world, visually engaged, transformed educationally, and absolutely defined socially. Generation Z moves rapidly and efficiently between work and play, with multiple distractions in the background, working on multiple tasks at once. It is estimated that the traditional path of higher education will not be of interest to them and they will instead complete school online, if at all. More than 70% of Generation Z want to be entrepreneurs (Skalická, 2018).

The end of the 1990s saw the appearance of the first mobile phones and simple “chat apps,” along with the use of email and the internet, which changed not only the educational environment but also the quality of life in all forms and areas. This means that by the time Generation Y entered the virtual world during their university study, Generation Z was being born into a world of excessive information.

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## Critical Thinking

Critical thinking intervenes into such problem areas as scientific thinking, formal and informal logic, probabilistic thinking, assessing the quality of information, generating and selecting alternatives and goals, and analyzing arguments, enabling adequate conclusions to be drawn (Ruisel, 2008). The literature dealing with critical thinking offers several definitions. The common denominator of different understandings of critical thinking is that it is a *skill*, an antipole of knowledge. This skill can arise and develop through practical activity. Critical thinking is therefore not innate. A person can develop it and use it spontaneously, when they are in life situations that compel them to deal with various issues. Critical thinking is the social construction of cognition. This statement is founded on the fact that critical thinking comes from constructivism, where the learner does not merely accept ready-made knowledge in meaningful learning. The knowledge acquired is the result of complex mental activity. The foundation is received information, but the student does not simply store it directly and mechanically in his or her memory. On the contrary; they transform the original information, reassesses it, relates it to their existing knowledge of the world, and uses it to construct their own interpretation of the world. With meaningful learning, what is presented to the student and what the student learns is never completely the same. The student brings their own view of phenomena to learning (Shuell, 1986). According to Schafritz et al. (1998, as cited in Gavora, 1995, p. 17) critical thinking is "a mental process that serves for obtaining and evaluating information and finding logical and objective conclusions". This definition implies three components of critical thinking. The first is the input and acquisition of information (searching, selecting, and sorting). This searching also necessitates the use of evaluation criteria. Therefore, this definition also contains the second component – evaluation, forming one's own opinion. The third component is the drawing of conclusions, which corresponds to the objective truth.

A *four-component model of critical thinking and cognition* (Ruisel, 2008) has come to the forefront of interest among experts. It includes

motivation for the demands made by critical thinking; knowledge of critical thinking skills; structural training to facilitate the transfer between contexts; and meta-cognitive monitoring. Critical thinking requires appropriate motivation for handling the demanding mental effort resulting from specific cognitive and affective activities. Antidogmatism, flexibility, a willingness to assess information objectively, and an understanding of the differences between rationalization and reasoning are assumed. These non-cognitive aspects of critical thinking presuppose the ability and motivation to assess an issue from manifold perspectives and to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. Strategies of critical thinking overlap with affective components. Cognitive and emotional processes operate in specific relationships. Instructions enabling the development of critical thinking place an emphasis on planning, suppressing impulsivity, and using situational and social contextual variables. Critical thinking skills, sometimes also called *higher order abilities*, differ from simpler abilities such as mechanical repetition or routine counting. They require appraisal, assessment, analysis, synthesis, and the search for associations.

### Research Methodology

In the period 2019–2021, we carried out (and are still carrying out) research at the Pedagogical Faculty of Prešov University in Prešov, Slovakia aimed at examining the correlation between students' ability to think critically, to implement individualistic and differentiated teaching, and to reflect professionally on their own activities in continuous pedagogical practice. In this study, we present the results from the first phase of research, in which it was necessary to identify and analyze the level of critical thinking in 60 master's degree students in the field of teaching for primary education (testing) at the Pedagogical Faculty of Prešov University. We want to compare the data with the results of testing in 2003 among 60 students of the Pedagogy Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences at the University of Prešov, that is, over a time span of 17 years. The aim of this comparative study is to identify

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whether an increase or decrease in the ability to think critically has occurred across the generations (a generational shift) in students of teaching. We set out the following research question: What is the level of critical thinking among future teachers compared to the previous generation?

Since the decade between Generation Y/Millennials and Generation Z/iGeneration caused diametrically different settings in their perceptions of the world, relationships, education, and the job market, our intent was to test whether these generational changes also extend to levels of critical thinking for university students (future teachers). We predicted that when tested in 2018, the level of critical thinking among the students would be higher than in 2003.

In order to determine the level of critical thinking ability, we used the Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Form C. The test consists of a series of five test exercises, each of which requires that analytical reasoning skills be applied to statements that represent a wide range of written and spoken materials that we often come across in everyday situations at work or study. The exercises contain the kind of information we commonly see in newspapers, magazines, or the media and include comments and statements that a person should not accept blindly, without critical assessment.

The first subtest (judgment) focuses on evaluating the validity of judgments based on a series of facts. The second subtest (recognition of assumptions) tests the identification of unspoken assumptions or assumptions from a series of statements. The aim of the third subtest (deduction) is to determine whether conclusions really do follow from the information contained in the given statements and premises. The fourth subtest (interpretation) is a test of the respondent's ability to consider facts and decide on the legitimacy of generalizations and conclusions derived from the given data. The fifth subtest (assessment of arguments) is focused on distinguishing between arguments which are strong and substantial with respect to a given problem and weak, insignificant arguments. These five subtests are intended to measure different but interrelated aspects of critical thinking. The test tasks require consideration of a series of statements (judgments, assumptions, conclusions, and arguments) related to

a given statement. The test subject's role is to study each statement and to evaluate the adequacy or validity of these statements.

The Critical Thinking Appraisal test (CTA) has been used frequently in the United Kingdom for many years now. Older American editions, which pioneered the detection of critical thinking, have been modified and adapted to the needs of selection procedures at several large companies and organizations. Thus, a suitable and verified form of the CTA Form C was created by the company Psychodidaktika a. s., Bratislava (2000).

## Results

The level of critical thinking in the sample of respondents who studied general education teaching in 2003 at the Department of Pedagogy ( $n = 60$ ; the 2003 respondents) was 2,714 points in the overall crude score on the Watson–Glaser test. On average, respondents achieved a total crude score of 45.23 points. The highest total crude score was 58 points out of 80 possible. The lowest score in the group was 24 points (Table 1).

**Table 1. The level of critical thinking among university students studying teaching in 2003 (2nd and 3rd year)**

Subtest	Highest score	Lowest score	Average score	Total points
Judgement (max. 16)	11	1	6.4	384
Recognition of assumptions (max. 16)	14	4	10.1	606
Deduction (max. 16)	13	4	8.56	514
Interpretation (max. 16)	13	0	9.72	583
Assessment of arguments (max. 16)	15	0	10.45	627
<b>Total crude scores (max. 80)</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>45.23</b>	<b>2,714</b>

The level of critical thinking in the sample of respondents who studied primary education teaching in 2018 ( $n = 60$ ; the 2018 respondents) was 2,603 points in the overall crude score on the Watson–Glaser Test.

On average, the respondents achieved an overall crude score of 43.38 points. The highest total crude score was 57 points out of 80 possible; the lowest score was 30 points (Table 2).

**Table 2. Level of critical thinking in university students studying primary education teaching in 2018 (4th year)**

Subtest	Highest score	Lowest score	Average score	Total points
Judgement (max. 16)	11	0	6.28	377
Recognition of assumptions (max. 16)	14	4	9.92	595
Deduction (max. 16)	12	3	8.08	485
Interpretation (max. 16)	14	3	9.17	550
Assessment of arguments (max. 16)	15	0	9.92	595
<b>Total crude scores (max. 80)</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43.38</b>	<b>2,603</b>

As Tables 1 and 2 show, the 2003 respondents achieved a higher level of critical thinking in terms of the overall crude score (2,714 points) than the 2018 respondents, in whom we recorded a lower level of critical thinking (by 111 points). These total crude scores in the study groups are a surprising finding, because we predicted that current students of teaching, for whom the world of information technology and excessive information is well-known, would have a higher ability to think critically than students 15 years ago. The results, however, suggest that the current generation of future teachers is worse in this regard.

When processing the results of the individual subtests, comparing the average values among the respondents, we arrived at some interesting findings. The 2003 respondents were the least capable in the first subtest, judgment, where they obtained 6.4 points out of a maximum of 16 (the maximum number of points in each subtest was 16). Here it was necessary to demonstrate whether they are able to come to a logical conclusion based on observed or assumed data and facts. They achieved the second-lowest average score – 8.56 points – in the third subtest, deduction, where it was necessary to judge the veracity of each of the conclusions in the test.

In the fourth subtest, interpretation, where it was necessary to assess whether or not the given conclusions are based drawn logically on the text provided (Conclusion follows or Conclusion does not follow), the 2003 respondents achieved an average of 9.72 points. In the recognition of assumptions (what we assume or consider to be true, guaranteed, and appropriate to a given situation; it is an opinion, a hypothesis, or an assumption), they achieved an average of 10.1 points. The 2003 respondents achieved their highest average score (10.45 points) in the assessment of arguments (the ability to judge the value of arguments and to distinguish which arguments are strong or weak with respect to the given problem).

The 2018 respondents, that is, students who graduated from university in July 2020 and entered into teaching practice, achieved on average the lowest number of points in the judgment subtest (6.28 points). However, their score was 0.12 points lower than that of the 2003 respondents. The nominal values indicate that university students have not improved in making judgements. Over a period of 15 years, the ability of university students to make deductions did not improve, which we consider to be a surprising finding. We therefore state that in both of the monitored groups the biggest problem for university students is coming to a logical conclusion based on data and facts.

In the 2018 respondents, we recorded the second-lowest value in the subtest deduction (8.08 points), which was 0.48 points lower than that of the 2003 respondents. On the ability to interpret, that is, to assess whether or not the given conclusions are drawn logically on the information given in the text, the respondents achieved on average 9.17 points, which was 0.55 points lower than the 2003 respondents. The 2018 respondents achieved their highest number of points (9.92) in both the recognition of assumptions and the assessment of arguments subtests. Both nominal values, however, were lower than those of the 2003 respondents: by 0.18 points in the recognition of assumptions and by 0.53 points in the assessment of arguments.

In Table 3 we present a comparison of the average values on the individual subtests in the groups of respondents as well as their respective order or placement from highest to lowest average number of points in the subtest.

**Table 3. Comparison of points obtained in individual subtests and their order in the groups of respondents**

Subtest		Judgement	Recognition of assumptions	Deduction	Interpretation	Assessment of arguments
Respondents (2003)	order	5*	2	4	3	1*
	points	6.4	10.1	8.56	9.72	10.45
Respondents (2018)	order	4	1	3	2	1*
	points	6.28	9.92	8.08	9.17	9.92

1\* – first place, most points; 5\* – last place, fewest points

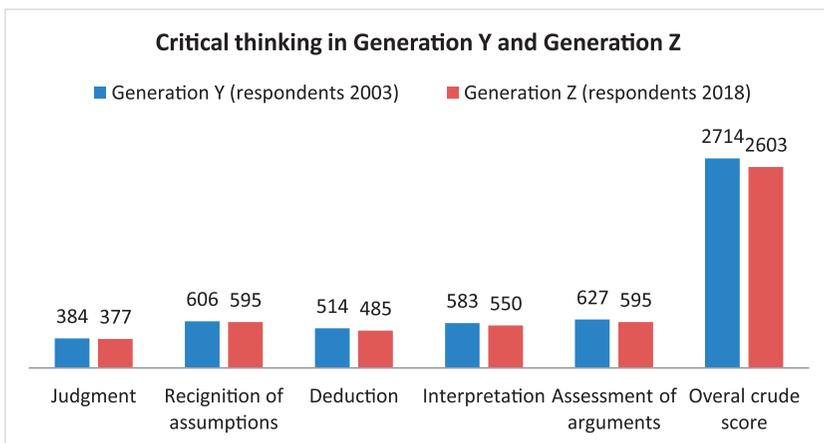
The ability to assess arguments came first (10.45 points) among the 2003 respondents. This was the same for the 2018 respondents, but the former had a higher average score. The ability to recognize assumptions was also in first place among the 2018 respondents, with the same number of points (9.92). The recognition of assumptions ranked in second place among the 2003 respondents (10.1 points), while the ability to interpret was second among the 2018 respondents. Third place for the 2003 respondents was occupied by the ability to interpret (9.72), while the 2018 respondents finished third in deduction. Deduction was in fourth place among the 2003 respondents, with 8.56 points, while judgment was fourth among the 2018 respondents, with 6.28 points. Finally, the fifth and final place among the 2003 respondents was held by the ability to make correct judgments, with 6.4 points.

Both groups of respondents achieved the most points in the assessment of arguments and the fewest points in making judgments. If we compare the monitored groups in the scores achieved on the individual subtests, that is, based on the data in Table 3, they indicate that the 2003 respondents achieved a relatively higher point score in all of the subtests (argument assessment, assumption recognition, interpretation, and deduction).

## Discussion

The fact that students of teaching achieved a higher level on a critical thinking test 17 years ago in comparison with current students is alarming. The modern age, in which it is very easy to access information because it is ubiquitous and available, is no guarantee that students will be able to work with information, verify it, or attribute value to it. The assumption that we made – that the level of critical thinking among students of teaching would be higher in 2018 than in 2003 – was not confirmed. The ability to think critically, according to the overall crude score of the Watson–Glaser Test for the 2018 respondents (Generation Z/iGeneration) was 111 points lower than that of the 2003 respondents (Generation Y/Millennials) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Comparison of the average values of the total crude score and the five subtests of the Watson–Glaser critical thinking test**



When interpreting the test scores for the individual subtests and comparing them between the groups of respondents (Figure 1), we emphasized that the ability to think critically can be taught to a certain extent and that this has long been a desirable goal in the educational process. Several experimental studies carried out at elementary and secondary

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schools and universities demonstrate that critical thinking skills can be improved through targeted training. The data in Figure 1, however, suggest that when we compare two generations of students of teaching who studied at the same university 15 years apart, the level of critical thinking has remained relatively the same, if not fallen. We could look for the causes of this unflattering result at all levels of education. The results indicate that Generation Y/Millennials, that is, students who studied at the university in 2003, have in five higher aspects of critical thinking a relatively higher average score than Generation Z/iGeneration, who completed their studies at the Faculty of Education in June 2020 (they were tested in 2018). This means that university students who were preparing for the teaching profession 17 years ago scored better than students today in this regard.

The iGeneration, in comparison with the Millennials, did not score higher on a single subtest. In judgment, the iGeneration (current students of teaching) received a total subtest score of 377 points, while Millennials scored 7 points more on average (384 points). We can also consider this invariable, that is, that the nominal values in this subtest are almost the same, which means that students have neither improved nor deteriorated in the 15 years in regard to their ability to draw logical conclusions based on observed, assumed, and derived facts. The stagnation is evident. The fact is that this ability creates a problem for students, because in both groups of respondents the average score on the judgement subtest was the lowest of all subtests.

In the subtest for assumption recognition, the difference between the groups of students was 11 points in favor of the Millennials, who scored 606 points, while the students of Generation Z totaled 595 points. In the subtest for deduction, the point difference between the groups of respondents was 29 points, again in favor of the Millennials, who scored an average of 514 points versus the iGeneration's 485 points.

The greatest differences in the average score of subtests between the groups of respondents were seen in the subtests for assessment of arguments (32 points difference) and interpretation (33 points difference), again in favor of the Millennial generation.

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The ability to assess arguments means evaluating whether or not conclusions are drawn logically on the information provided in a given text. The finding that current students of teaching are worse than their peers from 15 years ago in this regard is alarming. In the age of social networks, hypertext media, and the internet, it is essential that future teachers have the ability to argue on the basis of facts and data and to distinguish between opinion, thought, and fact-based information. Closely related to this is the ability to interpret, that is, the ability to distinguish strong arguments from weak ones in regard to the problem being solved.

### **Conclusion**

Critical thinking for 21st-century teachers is a necessary skill that they should have and develop over their lifetimes. We support this statement with the pedagogical premise of “from oneself to others.” If a teacher does not think critically, it is likely that they will not be able to develop this same ability in their students either. In the study, we tested future teachers – students of teaching at the university – in order to determine whether over the course of 17 years critical thinking has improved, or has seen an increase in the overall crude score on the Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal test. We compared the resulting values for the total crude critical thinking score and the individual attributes of critical thinking as tested through five subtests (judgment, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and assessment of arguments) between two groups of respondents. The first group was made up of 60 students from the Department of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences of the University of Prešov, Slovakia who were tested in 2003 and represented Generation Y/Millennials. The second group of respondents consisted of 60 students of primary education teaching at the Faculty of Education of the University of Prešov, who were tested in 2018 and represented Generation Z/iGeneration.

On the basis of the results, we can state that the ability of students to think critically has not increased between the generations. On the

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contrary, the data suggest that critical thinking among students of teaching is stagnating. We did not record any differences in the overall crude score or in the values of the individual subtests that would indicate that current students are better than students 15 years ago. The average scores in overall crude critical thinking and in the five subtests in Generation Z were in fact lower relative to Generation Y.

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## The Application of Video Games in Education: A Solution for the Lack of Motivation?

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### **Abstract**

There is a lack of motivation in high schools that is difficult to ignore. This is even worse in the case of history courses, which are perceived by students as “useless.” Many would cite video games and mobile phones as some of the technological changes that explain how teenagers are less interested in such subjects. However, there is an enormous educational potential in video games that should not be ignored. This work is an explanation of how history can be translated not only through audio-visual language, but also in the form of a new type of word: ludic language. Moreover, an educational activity is proposed in order to find a solution to this lack of motivation. For this activity, the Early Modern period simulator *Europa Universalis IV* has been chosen as the video game to be implemented in a history class for 14-year-olds.

*Keywords:* video games, *Europa Universalis IV*, Early Modern period, history, education, audio-visual language, narrative, ludic language, ludology

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## Introduction

In recent years, we have been able to see a massive change in almost every single aspect of society. Of course, education is not an exception to this rule. New techniques and theories have arisen in order to improve educational systems across the world. If we had to enumerate all the changes in our lives, we could not avoid mentioning the internet and mobile phones. However, there is another element that explains a massive change in classrooms all across the world: the appearance of video games (Feixa, 2008, pp. 31–32).

At first glance, it could seem that video games have no impact on education. Since children do not play in class, it seems nonsense to worry about them. Nothing could be further from the truth, in fact. From the point of view of communication, video games are a massive change from the conventional storytelling paradigm. This is due to the fact that in video games, the consumer is simultaneously the main protagonist. If the player fails at saving the world, the world is not saved. Nevertheless, in both literature and cinema, this is quite different. The consumer is just a viewer, an observer, who watches the deeds of a hero. In other words, in conventional storytelling, kids read or see how somebody does something incredible. In video games, however, they do those incredible things. This is why this new interactive language is much more attractive and powerful than the one used in a conventional, 50-minute class (Moreno, 2008, pp. 73).

Therefore, the irruption of this new language is said to make students lose interest in school. While this may be true, it is also true that the way conventional classes work is not optimal. For instance, it is worth taking a look at the subject of history taught in high school. It very often consists of telling students about many events and the year in which they took place. Quite often, educational systems fail in explaining to children why history is a relevant subject. Many of them, unfortunately, believe this subject is just a set of arbitrary dates they have to memorize for an exam because the system says so. They cannot be blamed for this, because somehow it is partially true.

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As a consequence, the lack of motivation in history classes across Western countries is a reality that cannot be ignored. A logical question arises: What can we do in order to tackle this issue? The Spanish scholar Francisco Mora says “you can only learn what you love,” a quote which became the subtitle of one of his main books: *Neuroeducación: Solo se aprende aquello que se ama* (Mora, 2017). In it, he argues that human beings are wired to learn fairly quickly when they like something, whereas this process is quite slow when they get bored.

In this article, a new proposal is expounded: What if we can use video games as a tool in order to teach history to teenagers? What if we give teenagers a goal that motivates them? What if they enjoy competing with classmates when playing a game? In order to develop answers to these questions, this article first addresses the usefulness of history in our contemporary world. A case study of a specific game is presented. This game is the grand-strategy, Early Modern period simulator *Europa Universalis IV* (Paradox Interactive, 2013). The article then proposes an activity that applies this video game to a history class.

### **The Usefulness of History**

One of the reasons that explain why teenage students see history as an uninteresting subject can be found in its practical use. History alone does not earn money for anyone, nor does it guarantee a proper position in such a competitive job market. If compared to other subjects, such as physics or economics, it seems clear that history is less practical. Nevertheless, the goal of having a decent knowledge of history is not just to embrace certain sociocultural elements from the world and culture that surround us. This may be one of the main purposes, but it is not the most relevant one.

Knowing history lets students understand two facts: that history is cyclic and that history is logical. This means that whatever happened in the past is likely to happen in the near future if the same logical chain occurs. For instance, the financial crises of both 1929 and 2008 left similar

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consequences: discredit of the establishment, political polarization, justification of economic interventionism, and – in some cases – the rise of extremist ideologies. Therefore, we can perfectly state that those citizens who had a deeper understanding of the Great Depression starting in 1929 were able to react better to the Great Recession from 2008, as it has recently been named (Zuckerman, 2010).

History is not the result of arbitrary decisions by evil rulers or the consequence of outlandish coincidences. On the contrary, historical evolution is linked to technological factors (ships, the compass, the steam machine, etc.), economic phenomena (feudalism, mercantilism, capitalism, etc.), and social iterations (culture, religion, the estate system). In other words, imagine that a country suddenly turned into a dictatorship. It is very likely that subjects like mathematics or chemistry would remain unchanged. Some changes would probably be made to language classes. Nevertheless, history would not be changed, so much as re-written from top to bottom. This is due to the consequence of the usefulness of history. That is, knowing history makes individuals independent from the political power and the sociocultural trends. This is why properly teaching history happens to be key in order to guarantee a good future for our civilization. Otherwise, our successors will not be able to understand their present, and thus, will fail when trying to adapt to the future.

### **History and Word**

Throughout the millennia, history has been transmitted from generation to generation using different types of communication. Of course, literature is one of the main sources, but the visual arts approach is equally relevant. It is worth taking a look at this famous painting of John III Sobieski by Daniel Schultz.

It is very easy to point out that this Polish–Lithuanian monarch is depicted as a Roman Emperor although he was not. In fact, his reign started 1,200 years after the last Western Roman Emperor had been overthrown. However, it is very likely that the painter wanted to express through visual

**Figure 1. Portrait of John III Sobieski in Roman costume (after 1680)**  
**Source: picture found in Wikimedia Commons (Schultz, 2005).**



words that John III was such a magnificent king for the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth – and that he deserved to be compared to the old emperors of Rome. Therefore, the word – understood as the smallest unity with meaning within a code – is not literal, but visual. This is utterly important in order to understand the purpose of this work.

Without any doubt, the 19th century was a revolution from very different points of view. Communication was not an exception. Two new forms of visual art appeared, namely, photography and cinema. The former represents reality as is, whereas the latter is usually a narrative construction. We can see that almost every single history book published after these inventions features photographs in order to better explain what was happening at that time. We cannot even imagine a book on World War II or the

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Cold War without some iconic pictures. Cinema, on the other hand, features both things. In documentaries, for instance, the cameras simply capture what reality is showing at that very moment in that place. However, cinema has often offered historical recreations of what a certain period would have been – which also includes actors, makeup, lights, scripts, and so on.

As for the late 20th century, another quite relevant breakthrough took place: interactive media. Video games are probably the most iconic iteration of this phenomenon.

### Introduction to Ludology

Before going deeper into analyzing *Europa Universalis IV* and its alleged suitability for history class, it is more appropriate to properly introduce some concepts first. The term *ludology* is a neologism that comes from the Latin *lūdus, lūdī* [game] and the Greek *λογία* [study or science]. It is therefore a discipline that studies games – whether these are electronic, table-based, or even sports – through their rules and communicative elements.

Dutch historian Johan Huizinga defines a *game* as a “free action or activity which developed among certain limits in terms of time and space according to a set of mandatory – yet freely accepted – rules” (Huizinga, 2012, pp. 54–55). Huizinga also states that games have an ultimate goal which consists in pretending it is not taking place in real life, but in a commonly agreed, imaginary setting. Of course, video games can fall under the umbrella of this definition, yet they add some relevant elements. A common definition that can be found in a dictionary under the entry for *video game* would be “an electronic game that is displayed using a screen” (Real Academia Española, n.d.).

Two elements are added here, which have tremendous implications. Firstly, it is electronic, so it works through automatized computer software. This means that the rules are not “freely accepted,” as in Huizinga’s definition. The rules are automatic. Video games do not need players to agree to the conditions, nor do they need a referee, as in most sports, in

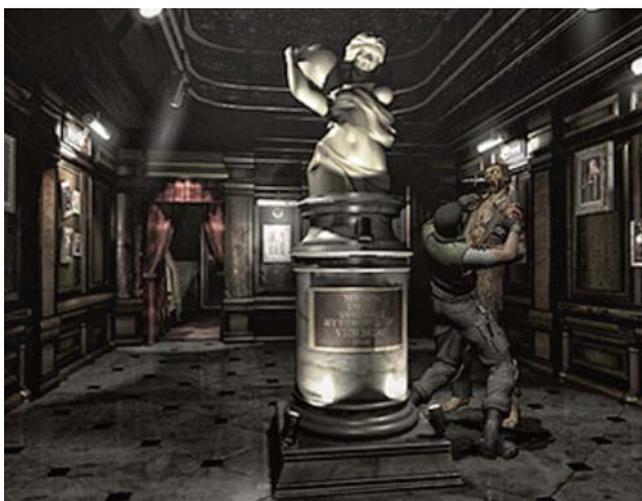
order to ensure the observance of such rules. On the contrary, there is an omniscient referee, who watches all the time and sets the score automatically. Shouting to this referee or calling for a revision is useless.

The second new element is that video games are displayed using a screen. As a consequence, visual and auditory elements come into consideration. Thus, many of the communication developments found in other media – the use of color, music, voices, text, lighting, and so on – can be applied here. Of course, game mechanics – i.e., rules – are a quite relevant element as well. Furthermore, video games can express ideas and emotions through conventional audio-visual language. Nevertheless, they have another new type of communication: ludic narrative, or communicating through its automatized mechanics.

One example, for instance, would be the survival horror adventure *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 2002). While it is fair to say that this game has plenty of audio-visual resources that help to create a gloomy environment, some ludic elements help to do this as well. For instance, the limited possibilities of movement combined with a fixed-camera system make the player quite vulnerable to any threat.

**Figure 2. Resident Evil (Capcom, 2002)**

**Source: picture found in Wikimedia Commons.**



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Also, as zombies hit the player, the health bar drops lower. This has no real implication in other games, but in *Resident Evil* it certainly does. The worse the health bar is, the slower the player will walk. In other words, this game's rules are automatized in a way that creates a lot of tension and a feeling of vulnerability, of being alone in front of an imminent, deadly danger.

To make this feeling even more disturbing, the save system is a bit peculiar. In order to save, players have to use typewriters. However, there are limited spots on the map with typewriters. In other words, players cannot save progress whenever they want. Furthermore, in order to save, players need to spend ink ribbons each time they want to use these typewriters. Therefore, the number of times the player can save is actually quite limited. This forces the player to manage resources wisely and to be very careful with potential dangers. If the player dies, they will have to come back to the last time they saved, and hours of progress may be lost. The risk is expanded tremendously through rules and ludic narrative, rather than through conventional audio-visual elements.

### **Management Simulators and Systemic Gameplay**

First of all, the term *video game* covers many different products of different kinds. The above-mentioned *Resident Evil* is a third-person action-adventure title based on both exploration and puzzle-solving. It is therefore quite different from other genres, such as the Japanese role-playing game series *Final Fantasy* or common sports recreations like *FIFA*. Keeping that in mind, there is a video game genre that turns out to be quite an interesting one for educators: management simulators. These games have systemic gameplay, that is to say, all of those mechanics and rules present in the game are just different gears within a big clock. This means that if the player carries out a small change in just one area of the game, the rest of it will be affected.

For example, *Caesar III* (Impressions Games, 1998) is an easy-to-understand example. This is a management simulator that consists of building

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cities in the ancient Roman Empire. Every single aspect the player changes in the game – building a home, destroying a palace, or betting on exporting wheat – results in a change in the remaining aspects. For instance, spending too much will result in a deficit, which will mean the player will have to ask the Emperor for funds and lose credibility as a Roman civil servant. However, if the player wisely builds houses far from industry while placing markets near the city gates, a large revenue stream will be generated and wealthier citizens will move to the city.

The remarkable thing is that through such a clockwork set of ludic rules, *Caesar III* recreated the two main achievements of the Roman Empire: Romanization and trade-node cities. A person that has played this game to the point of understanding its depth and has succeeded in building such cities will very likely understand what the Roman Empire was. That person would not need to memorize dozens of Latin names and dates, but will comprehend the factors and processes that ended up creating one of the greatest empires in world history.

### **How *Europa Universalis IV* Translated History Language into Ludic Language**

*Europa Universalis IV* is the culmination of historical recreation combined with systemic gameplay. Therefore, it is the perfect example of how the words used in history can be translated not only into visual art, music, or cinema, but into ludic language as well. And precisely because of that, it is quite a good title for being implemented in history classes in high schools. The functioning of ludic words has been already explained. Nevertheless, in order to understand how this translation took place, it is also necessary to explain what the game is and how it works. *Europa Universalis IV* is a management simulator in which, instead of building cities, the player takes control of a specific country in 1444. The player sees a map of the world and they have a user interface they use in order to rule their dominions.

**Figure 3. 1444 map in Europa Universalis IV**

**Source: Screenshot by this article author.**



As the game progresses, players and AI-controlled countries interact in order to fulfill the historical goal of those countries during the Early Modern period: to maintain their dominions and defend from both foreign and domestic aggressions (Maquiavelo, 2016). Diplomacy, trade, public spending, the army, the navy, and so on are just the tip of quite a deep ludic iceberg. The game evolves slowly and ends in 1821. During this evolution, some rules are history-driven. For instance, there is a value in the game called “reform desire”. This will increase as Catholic countries abuse some ecclesiastical prerogatives. When it reaches 100 points, an algorithm will be triggered and – in most scenarios – a German-speaking province will be the center of the Reformation, where a monk will write his 95 theses. Another history-driven element is the mission system. Each country will have a mission tree. Completing these missions will give that country some improvements and bonifications. For instance, if Poland is selected, the player will gain certain advantages if Mazovia is reincorporated into the Kingdom of Poland, and even greater ones if the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is eventually formed.

Figure 4. Polish mission tree

Source: Paradox Wikis ("Polish Missions", n.d.)



Nevertheless, the game borders are only historically accurate at the beginning of the game (1444 AD). After that moment, everything is fiction. Despite those history-driven events, nations will compete. For instance, the Partitions of Poland ended up erasing the country from the map during the late 18th century, but if the player plays well as Poland–Lithuania, and properly manages trade, the army, and diplomacy, they will not only survive, but probably devour part of Prussia, Russia, or Austria as well.

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One of the most important factors in a *Europa Universalis IV* game is stability. This is a value from -3 to +3 that represents the level of people's satisfaction with policies, and thus with the level of peace within the realm ("Stability", n.d.). Generally speaking, the higher stability, the better conditions and vice versa. For each positive point of stability, the country gains +1% in trade power, +5% in foreign spy detection, -1 to national unrest, +5% in national taxes, +0.5% in missionary strength, and +5% in institution spread. In other words, the higher stability, the better the trade, the less vulnerability to spies and revolts, the more public income, and the faster conversion to a different faith and spread of ideas. However, for each negative point of stability, the country will suffer some penalties, namely, -1% in trade power, -5% in foreign spy detection, +2 in national unrest, -1 legitimacy point per year, and +1% in interest. Therefore, the player must keep stability as high as possible. Otherwise, chaos will devour the country, and it will be vulnerable to the surrounding nations, who most likely will be interested in conquering new provinces.

This way, *Europa Universalis IV* translates the historical duty of rulers to work for their subjects' benefit. If rulers do not, problems will arise and rebellions will be around the corner. Thus, a new question emerges: How can players gain or lose stability points? This game manages a stability cost system. The base cost is 100 points of administrative power, which are obtained on a yearly basis depending on the ruler's administrative ability. This cost may vary depending on several factors ("Prestige", n.d.), such as having a ruler with a calm personality (-10%), being an Eastern Orthodox country (-10%), or being a Catholic country which controls the Vatican Curia (-10%). Like stability, prestige is a value, ranging from -100 to +100, that measures the glory, honor, and international respect that a country deserves. There are no consequences if prestige equals 0, but as it increases, so does the range of advantages. For instance, at -100 prestige, trade power will decrease (-15%). At +100, it will increase (+15%). This progression is linear: at 0 prestige points, there is no variation, but at +50 trade power increases by +7.5%. Naturally, prestige does not affect trade alone, but army morale ( $\pm 10\%$ ), spy detection ( $\pm 10\%$ ), legitimacy ( $\pm 1$  per year), aggressive expansion ( $\pm 10\%$ ), and many other factors as well.

Prestige is obtained through certain international deeds, such as being the defender of a Christian or Muslim faith, hiring a philosopher as counsellor, controlling the Vatican Curia, receiving a papal blessing, taking part in a Crusade, or being the Holy Roman Emperor. Of course, some deeds will decrease prestige. Not helping an ally at war and committing apostasy will cost -25 and -100 points of prestige, respectively. If the crown prince becomes a bad ruler, the player can disinherit him, which would most likely ensure a better heir, though it will mean -50 points of prestige. Finally, losing wars or acceding to rebels' requests will of course make prestige fall quite easily.

A similar, yet not identical, mechanic is legitimacy. While prestige is a national value, legitimacy is a personal one. It measures the respect of the population toward their ruler. In fact, this value resets whenever the ruler dies and a new monarch arrives. Legitimacy is a value from 0 to +100 and has some positive effects if this level is high enough. As with prestige, the effects from legitimacy follow a linear progression. Legitimacy affects national unrest ( $\pm 2\%$ ), religious tolerance ( $\pm 1\%$ ), diplomatic reputation ( $\pm 1$ ), and income from vassals ( $\pm 5\%$ ), among several other factors ("Monarchy", n.d.).

The goal of this article is not to develop every single aspect of the game's algorithms. Instead, the goal of this brief analysis is to help readers understand how this game makes players behave exactly as if they were kings back in the Early Modern period. Players will manage royal marriages with powerful dynasties in order to guarantee peace and good relations with the main powers; they will convert to a Protestant faith if it facilitates them getting a *casus belli* – that is, a justification for war – against their rivals; and they will wait until their neighbors are vulnerable in order to take some rich provinces after a quick but fruitful war.

### Previous Examples in Video Games

Before thinking of an application of any video game in high schools, it is quite relevant that previous examples are taken into account. Prof. Moreno states that using educational video games would be a mistake, since those

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are extremely uninteresting for students (Moreno, 2008, pp. 73–74). The main goal of such an activity would vanish. This is why Prof. Moreno proposed *Zoo Tycoon* (Blue Fang Games, 2001), a simulator in which players manage a zoo, including staff, salaries, ticket prices, rooms, shows, areas, cages, animals, and so on. The objective in this game is to create an efficient zoo, one whose customers are satisfied, which is solvent, and which fulfills some of the public's demands.

Moreno's research consisted of watching what students would do, but Moreno decided not to intervene throughout this activity. After his research, he wrote that

Regarding *Zoo Tycoon* ... we made teenagers play it without imposing any constriction, so most of them focused on watching what would happen if rules were broken; for instance, some set lions free, so they started to eat customers. Such an example shows the relevance of constrictions for an educational application. [translated by the author] (Moreno, 2008, p. 87)

In other words, leaving teenagers to play video games with no control would be a mistake. Teachers should not allow this, as it could lead to difficult problems or – as in the above-mentioned example – would mean the activity was a failure.

On the other hand, some games, despite having no educational intention, have achieved some success in the teaching community. This is the case with *Minecraft* by Mojang Studios, one of the most successful titles in video game history. There is even a website called *Education.Minecraft*, where teachers can find documentation on how to apply this game to different areas of education. Another interesting case is the one reported by Antònia Bernat Cuello. He was part of a research team on the use of the Medieval strategy game *Age of Empires II: The Conquerors* in a history class for 11-year-olds. Bernat Cuello stated in an article that

video games reduce the description of very complex realities to essential mechanisms. They provide conflict simulation using fun

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gameplay rules ... which lead players through a path we could call a "suspension of insecurity," that is, confidence in finding a solution. It is an absolute success, even though the way may be long and complicated. Moreover, they will enjoy and learn more if there are a lot of hard challenges. [translated by the author] (Bernat Cuello, 2008, p. 95)

### **Application of *Europa Universalis IV* in High Schools**

There are five speed levels in *Europa Universalis IV*. Level 5 is so fast that is not realistic for students to understand anything, yet level 1 is too slow. For this project, level 2 is proposed for the whole activity, where each passing minute is equivalent to 58 virtual days. Considering classes last around 55 minutes, it would mean 3,190 days per class, or eight years and nine months per class. This activity is proposed to be divided into six sessions.

It is recommended that students form groups of three, since it is a complex game and collaborative learning is a key goal during the activity. The game will start in the year 1500 and only a predetermined set of countries will be available for these teams. In order to reduce the number of options, it is proposed that each team selects a medium-sized country within the Holy Roman Empire. This way, they will be able to understand what that political organization was and why Ottoman Turkey and the Reformation were its main threats during the 16th century.

However, a key component of this activity that must be defined is the teacher's role. Those who want to implement an activity like this in their classroom must have a deep understanding of the game. As it has been shown above, it is quite a complex game; thus, teachers must be knowledgeable not only about the age the game is recreating, but also about the game's rules and mechanics. It is highly recommended that the teachers give a small dossier to every team the first day so that students may have some knowledge on the basic rules, tips, and so on.

As a matter of fact, teachers have a triple role. First, they have a ludic role, since they will play the game as a country. It is very likely that students

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will compete among each other quite aggressively – do not forget that they are still teenagers. Therefore, if the teacher is playing Austria, which is the most powerful country within the Holy Roman Empire and the seat of its Emperor at the beginning of the game, he or she can somehow set some level of peace and stability among the different powers in the game. This is, by the way, how the Holy Roman Empire worked during the Early Modern period. Secondly, there is an academic role. The teacher has to guide this activity so the students can adopt critical thinking and apply to their knowledge of history the logical elements the game offers. Going from table to table, watching what the students are doing and checking that they understand what they are doing are key in order to have a successful activity. Thirdly, the teacher should help with troubleshooting, not only for hardware and software issues, which will certainly occur. Moreover, teachers should maintain a good atmosphere in class. Once again, it cannot be forgotten that they are teenagers who are both competing and collaborating. There will be treasons among teams, who will switch from allies to enemies in a second. Therefore, teachers might encounter moments of tension.

The first session of this activity will consist of a first contact. This means that teachers will inform students about the rules and both the ludic and academic objectives. Additionally, students will form teams, choose a country to play, and will spend the rest of the class in an unofficial game, so they can become familiar with the interface. In the next four sessions the students will play the game. Each day, they will resume their progress from the last class. They will not play during the sixth session; instead they will discuss the activity and will exchange ideas on what they have learned.

Ludic objectives are in-game deeds the students can achieve which will have positive academic results. For instance, they may receive an extra point in their grades if they manage to become elected the new Holy Roman Emperor. Seemingly, academic objectives are some homework they must do. It is recommended that the first day they receive a set of questions they have to answer in a four-page composition. These questions will ask about historical events, and so the students will not

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just play a game, but will be required to demonstrate what they have learned.

A cost study was made on August 2020 in order to ensure that it is affordable for many schools in Europe. According to the prices in the online video game store Instant Gaming, a full copy of the game costs €66.66, whereas a basic license would cost €3.49 (Instant Gaming, n.d.). Since only one full copy is needed, and assuming there would be about five teams, the cost would be approximately €84.11 for the whole activity. Of course, if the teachers wanted to repeat the activity, the cost would be €0.

### Conclusion

A lack of motivation is one of the most relevant issues concerning high schools. It particularly affects subjects like history, since these are not directly linked to a well-paid position in the job market. Nevertheless, history is still one of the most important subjects in modern-day education systems. Historical knowledge makes citizens independent of cultural trends and the political regime. Therefore, there is a conundrum to be solved: How can this situation be reverted? As discussed in this article, video games may be an interesting solution. They are a powerful way of modifying our way of communicating, of changing the words we use in education.

*Europa Universalis IV* is just one example of this. However, many other games have been used for educational purposes. Some of them, like *Kerbal Space Program*, instead of being applied to 15-year-olds, have been implemented by the NASA training program (NASA, 2016). However, these cannot be taken as some kind of panacea that would solve our problems. It is just a tool that can be used in certain specific situations. It will not replace either conventional classes or the role of teachers. In fact, both aspects of a traditional education are quite present in the activity that is proposed in this article.

The key to understanding why this may mean a change in motivation can be found in the very nature of video games. While words in cinema

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and literature are passive, that is, we as users can only hear or read, words in video games can be also spoken and written. In other words, students will not see how the hero is saving the world – they will be the ones saving it. Therefore, motivation has its source in such an intellectual challenge that produces a powerful feeling of reward as well.

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# Miscellaneous Articles

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## **Words and Silence in Job Mentoring**

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### **Abstract**

Today, economic sustainability is a social priority and it implies positive, rewarding, and creative relationships in the workplace. Creativity, innovation, and subjective welfare will remain extremely important for sustainable production models in an age of technological acceleration, ecological threats, and digital globalization. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new ways to organize work, this is even more important. The basis for this is to be found in education, especially in secondary and higher education. Good mentoring is becoming essential in professional development; this activity is based on words and silence, using corporate and individual coaching tools to open new doors of creativity. Following Peter Drucker's (1954) work in management thinking and the approach of positive psychologists, this paper presents a new concept of sustainable working relationships for the 21st century based on words and narratives.

*Keywords:* mentoring, coaching, education, leadership, management styles

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## **Introduction: The Word and Management in Modern Companies**

We need to reclaim the role of the word in the activity of business management professionals, to reclaim the word as a tool of positive influence for those who are responsible for other people. Management is one of the most influential social disciplines and words are the main vehicle for human interaction. This is especially relevant when we refer to mentoring and coaching as activities associated with managerial functions.

In our fast-moving society, the use of the word has become a matter of great importance in professional activity. It has always been a part of management, but words as a motivating factor and as an aid to mentoring must go a step further. It should not be seen as a complement to more technical skills and knowledge; rather, it is a fundamental, necessary, and irreplaceable tool.

One issue we should first comment on when referring to a company concerns its environment. One of the most defining influences of the age we live in is the focus on ecology and sustainability. Although this article is dedicated to the importance of the word in management education, it is important to highlight the social determinants that have the greatest impact. One illustrative and highly relevant determinant is the search for sustainable development, which John Dernbach (as cited in Friedman, 2009) stated "is among the most important ideas to come out of the 20th century .... Something is environmentally or ecologically sustainable when it protects, restores, or regenerates the environment rather than degrades it" (p. 52). Both authors introduce the concept of sustainability as one of the driving forces that will affect corporate and social development in the coming years.

The ecological challenge is undoubtedly one of the greatest we face at present and thus when we refer to management issues and specifically the use of the word, we need to take it into account – along with other challenges that we should briefly mention, such as technology, the impact of globalization, the media revolution, and the rise in inequality. This last factor, in particular, has a profound connection with people's working lives.

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The contradictions and factors regarding disengagement or lack of motivation with work are the consequence of a social situation that has been taking hold in recent decades. The work of managers cannot be analyzed in isolation from this social context. If we are willing to defend the intense use of the word as a tool for transformation, it must be done realistically, without ignoring the real difficulties. The environment cannot be left aside, not only the most immediate one currently defined by the sudden COVID-19 crisis, but also the one defined by chronic dysfunctions in the globalized economic system:

over recent decades, markets have not done a good job of ensuring the basic requisites of a decent life for all. Some of these failures are now well understood: markets would prefer to insure only the healthy, and they devote enormous resources to differentiating between the healthy and others. But a society where only the healthy can get insurance will not be a productive or healthy society. (Stiglitz, 2020, pp. 208–209)

What we wish to emphasize with the above is that the intervention of people dedicated to mentoring in secondary and higher education must be carried out with an extensive range of social, psychological, and motivational variables. However, despite all this, the word of a mentor, the word of a manager, or the accompaniment of a good coach is decisive for personal wellbeing and professional success. Apart from the management of people, subjects such as those related to professional development and the discrepancies between the practice of organizations and the aspirations of young people and even older professionals in their career at work or in a business, university curricula rarely include subjects resembling the humanities. This is a modern-day discrepancy, as Armin Trost highlights in his articles (2016, 2017).

Moreover, digital technology and its impact on society brings many advantages as well as challenges. Innovation and social innovation create new frameworks, which demand changes in the managerial field, especially in human interaction, but in this specific area changes are slow.

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More informally, but with a background of great interest in understanding our reality, Alessandro Baricco addressed this issue:

With each passing day, people are losing some of their humanity, preferring a more performative and less reliable artificiality. When they can, they delegate choices, decisions, and opinions to machines, algorithms, statistics, classifications. The result is a world in which the potter's hand is perceived less and less, to use an expression pleasing to Walter Benjamin: it seems to have come more from an industrial process than from an artisanal gesture. Is this how we want the world to be? Accurate, polished, and cold. (Baricco, 2019, pp. 21–22)

Although it has been a trend in recent decades, it should be noted that one of the greatest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the rapid increase in and implementation of remote working. Although it remains to be seen how it will be extended across sectors, the word will be an important instrument in helping to reorganize work in the new personal and employment conditions imposed by the “new normal.”

### **Economic and Ethical Globalization: The Word as an Indispensable Tool**

The summary set out in the previous section is intended to situate the need for change in much of the inertia that still besets professional life in businesses. Many curricula and syllabi are still based on a socioeconomic situation typical of the mid-20th century.

In a world in which digital globalization influences almost every aspect through an almost instantaneous connection, it could be worth implementing what Adela Cortina defends in her proposals: moving from economic globalization to ethical globalization. For Cortina, we live in a “Global Village,” as described by the communication theorist McLuhan (1992), in which

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selfishness is an old-fashioned attitude, as [is] petty tribalism .... In the face of these universal challenges, there is only room for the response of a universalist ethical attitude that has as its horizon, for decision-making, the universal good, although it is necessary to build it from the local good. (Cortina, 2009, pp. 218–219)

The previous reference to structural changes, digital globalization, and technological acceleration allows us to frame a series of changes for which the influence of mentors, persuasion, and the ability to inspire are actions and categories that are not only desirable, but necessary and essential.

In this context, the use of speech and silence is fundamental in order to organize transitions of both a personal and professional nature at a time when the amount of information and messages of all kinds has reached saturation point, resulting in mistakes – as highlighted by Daniel Goleman in one of his most recent pieces:

Attention has ended up becoming the main problem .... The bombardment of data leads to negligent shortcuts, such as careless filtering of e-mails, exclusively paying attention to their headers, missing many voice messages and the too fast reading of messages and reminders .... This situation had already been noticed in 1977 by Herbert Simon, Nobel Prize winner in Economics. While writing about the advent of an information-rich world, he noted that information consumes the attention of its recipients. Thus, excess information is accompanied by a poverty of attention. (Goleman, 2013, pp. 21–22)

The use of the word, of the good word, is and will be of the greatest importance in professional life, as mentioned by Professor Álvarez de Mon (quoted by Gonzalez-Alorda, 2011):

Words, silence, gestures, and listening are powerful instruments of self-knowledge, relationships, and coexistence. However,

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unfortunately, despite the fact that talking is an activity natural to people that is free and within everyone's reach, it is a scarce and very expensive thing. (p. 12)

The dissociation between the importance of the word and the training received by those who are preparing to lead, in degree programs or professional programs, is extremely marked. In curricula or syllabi in business schools, we may find a few subjects dedicated to business communication, both external and internal, in addition to those of a more technical nature (Finance, Marketing, Operations, etc.). However, not enough attention is paid to the word as an indispensable tool in professional life.

Before examining in detail the impact of the word, it would be convenient to take into consideration two related fundamental areas: the economic and social environment and the ability to learn new skills. It is important to know the reality, "the playing field," or in other words, where we really are; the importance of promoting the word as a tool of maximum value is derived from this.

### **The Need for a New Mindset**

The macrotrends driving our society have been defined in recent years by a common factor: acceleration. Technology accelerations and digital globalizations are transforming economic relationships, leading to a new world with deep consequences for people's lives. At the same time, information technologies are advancing rapidly along with the constant increase in ecological challenges, the balance in nature, and the risks presented by climate change. All this is intended to highlight the conditions in which people live today, though of course with important differences according to the countries they live in and their level of wealth and distribution.

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## The Importance of the Word in the Age of Technology

Another circumstance that we need to consider is access to information. The word is a key integral part of the information sent through the Internet. Since we access practically everything through the Internet these days, this introduces new dimensions to consider when analyzing the social reality, especially the reality in companies and in 21st-century professional life.

Access to extensive information, mainly through the word – sometimes ordered and at other times chaotic – forces us to take into account a situation that in academic debates perhaps remains in the background. We need to bear in mind that we are immersed in an interconnected society based on a new information architecture (Jarvis, 2009). Information is transmitted through *links*, something that is impacting the importance of the social use of words. How this information is transmitted through links is something that must be considered for any analysis on the importance of the word.

In the context of change, in which technologies play a growing role, the word gains even greater importance in the world of work and professional relationships – and by extension in all types of social relationships.

In the context of this article, we refer to the word in its various manifestations, namely written and spoken by people; however, we should also consider the help –through the word – provided by solutions based on algorithms and software, for example, *Cortana* for Windows or *Siri* for IOS, in addition to others whose numbers are growing by the day, such as speech based on algorithms and artificial intelligence.

## The Growing Importance of Trainers, Mentors, Tutors, and Coaches

Tutoring, mentoring, and coaching each have a different function. A mentor is not the same as a tutor or a coach, but from the point of view of this article we will adopt a flexible approach when defining these

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categories, since the aim is to study the role of the word, of the good word – or of silence where appropriate – and not so much the particulars of each role. All of these activities, with their various methods and circumstances, are designed to help and influence people and organizations for the better.

The role of technology must be placed in an appropriate context, but under the assumption that it is not the most important thing when it comes to guiding, influencing, and orienting in the professional world.

In 2014, Brandon Busteed of the Gallup Institute carried out a huge survey of North American university graduates who had been working in companies or developing their professions for more than five years. The research can be summarized in a question that was addressed to the professionals regarding what they considered to be the most important factor in their years at college or technical school that encouraged them to follow a professional career track. From the results of the survey – carried out on more than a million professionals – two aspects clearly stood out:

Successful students had one or more teachers who were mentors and took a real interest in their aspirations, and they had an internship related to what they were learning in school. The most engaged employees, said Busteed, consistently attributed their success in the workplace to having had a professor or professors who cared about them as a person, or having had a mentor who encouraged their goals and dreams. (Friedman, 2016, pp. 242–243).

The results of the study highlight two characteristics that relate to the importance of the word. Mentors, tutors, and company coaches have at their disposal a fundamental tool: using words, the good word, or sometimes even silence. What the professionals most valued, what truly defined their life and professional career, was the result of crossing paths with leading people who had left a deep impression on them.

To achieve this relationship of acceptance, there must be a circumstance, a situation that does not usually feature much in professional

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fields or in management degree programs, and it relates to loving people. Indeed, to influence someone you have to love, you have to appreciate others. An example of the importance of this aspect in the transformation of people and organizations is described below.

Positive influence of mentoring and accompanying are aspects of great importance that usually do not receive enough attention.

One example which may help to illuminate the importance of this category was given some time ago by Oxford Leadership Academy consultant Brian Bacon at the end one of his lectures to a small group of attendees. At the end of the day, according to Gonzalez-Alorda's transcript, Bacon (as cited in González-Alorda, 2011) explained:

A few years ago I took part in a conference in San Francisco. I was a minor lecturer at a great event in which giant figures like Peter Drucker, Peter Senge, and Michael Hammer were speaking: The Who's Who of leadership and organizational change. The conference was taking place in the context of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. For two days the lecturers had given a display of scientific wisdom on how to lead organizations. The subjects went from re-engineering human resources to changing structures, via the best keys to leadership ....

At the end of these conferences, the organizers normally distribute a questionnaire on which one may evaluate the speakers and the impact of their messages. To everyone's surprise, Mother Teresa of Calcutta – whom they had persuaded to take part in the event – came first in the ranking, far ahead of the person in second place. Curiously, she was not on the panel of speakers, but had simply been invited to give a brief message at the end.

In fact, she spoke for no more than thirty seconds. She mounted the platform, waited a moment in silence and then, in a very soft voice, said: "So you want to change people. But do you know your people? And do you love them? Because if you don't know your people, there will be no understanding, and

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if there is no understanding, there will be no trust, and if there is no trust, there will be no change. And do you love your people? Because if there is no love in what you do, there will be no passion, and if there is no passion, you will not be ready to take risks, and if you are not ready to take risks, nothing will change. So if you want your people to change, think, 'Do I know my people? And do I love my people?'"

Mother Teresa's message had remained suspended in the auditorium, and it was clear that it had struck home. As strongly as when someone hears the truth. (pp. 43–44)

Brian Bacon's words described Mother Teresa's intervention, which has some teachings that should be highlighted. Firstly, the account of what happened as explained by Bacon, a professor and consultant who works in the reality of today's companies, provides us a perspective connected to many references that in professional language remain to a certain extent included under the category of *emotional intelligence*. The popularization of emotional intelligence as a concept in the fields of management and management education owes so much to Daniel Goleman (1997, 1998) and others.

On many occasions in professional knowledge, words are often used that do not quite define the ideas that underlie them. Perhaps loving others is often described using the term empathy, although it is not the same thing. Speaking the way Mother Theresa did at a meeting of specialists helps to clarify certain concepts, but her words could not be used by a consultant. In order to lead, it is essential to cultivate emotional intelligence, and in order to be close to people you have to love them. However, this notion seems incompatible with a language we call professional, which is characterized by its distance and oftentimes by handling abstract concepts and meanings that are to a certain degree vague.

This situation is explained very well by González-Alorda (2011) when referring to what Brian Bacon explained about Mother Teresa's brief intervention:

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That account of Brian Bacon brought me to the following conclusion: To get people to change, the best way is to inspire them, after having accepted them as they are. And you are inspiring when others see not only your professional qualities, but also certain personal qualities worthy of being emulated – when there is consistency between what you think and what you say, and also between what you say and what you do. In short, when you transmit authenticity, a quality which is won through many little efforts and which, frequently, requires you to swim against the current. (pp. 44–45)

### **Developing a Giving Attitude**

Various studies exist that provide empirical evidence of the importance of having an attitude of giving to others – indeed, it is even one of the ways of achieving a successful professional career, as highlighted by Adam Grant, professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania (2014). Based on empirical studies, Adam Grant, who comes from the professional field of social psychology, explains in *Give and Take* how managers who give themselves to others achieve successful career paths in much greater numbers than those who only take advantages from others. Today, with technological acceleration, organizations need creativity and fluidity and should not depend on hierarchical barriers that hold back the ideal of an organization today, which is to be agile.

### **Social Creativity, Innovation, and Adaptation**

Fostering creativity is directly linked to empathy and the need to make the most of everyone's capacities and abilities. Mentoring, good influence, and good words will make it possible to promote innovation and creativity, and to give meaning to people's lives. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in relation to the psychological basis of creativity, wrote that

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when we live creatively, boredom is banished and every moment holds the promise of a fresh discovery. Whether or not these discoveries enrich the world beyond our personal lives, living creatively links us with the process of evolution. Most of the suggestions derived from the study of creative lives can be implemented by anybody regardless of age, gender, or social condition. (1996, p. 344)

Proposals and alternative approaches to fostering creativity are not new; they have already undergone a long journey. Technological acceleration, however, demands a change in the way we manage and behave in organizations. Transitioning to new stages will only be possible with the continuous work of people in companies – with inspiration, mentoring, and coaching – to ensure that technological advances are not held back by a lack of social innovation and the slow adaptation of humans.

Eric “Astro” Teller, the current director of project X at Alphabet – the parent company of Google and others – highlighted this situation. He explained this to *The New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman by means of two curves on a graph, one showing technological progress – which has accelerated in recent years – and another, more static one showing the adaptation of humans, which was slower than the technological acceleration. As Thomas Friedman explained:

So that is going on with scientific and technological progress .... He'd promised two lines, and he now drew the second, a straight line that began many years ago above the scientific progress line but since then had climbed far more incrementally, so incrementally you could barely detect its positive slope.

“The good news is that there is a competing curve,” Teller explained. “This is the rate at which humanity (individuals and society) adapt to changes in this environment. This,” he added, “can be technological changes (mobile connectivity), geophysical changes (such as the Earth warming and cooling), or social changes.” (Friedman, 2016, pp. 30-31)

Social changes are the slowest to take place. If we examine life and the curve that shows the activity of companies, we will notice the slowness and the need to change. Here the role of mentors and coaches is essential in providing help in advancement. It is also essential to help avoid a situation in which the companies that define themselves as “agile” are still very similar to those places described by the sociologist Richard Sennett (2000), whose studies on work changes in the United States at the end of the 1990s highlighted factors that result in frustration, including routine, boredom, and the frustration many people feel in their jobs and in their professional relationships.

### **Management, Mentoring, and the Word in Future Management**

The culture of organizations does not allow changes to be made with the speed required by current times. Managers who act as coaches, or through external mentors, have to be considered in the context of cultural factors, as highlighted by Edgar Schein (2010, pp. 7–33): The three main points are 1) what we see and know, 2) values and beliefs, and 3) what is assumed and not explicitly stated.

These factors are deeply ingrained in organizations and, unfortunately, are not always so obvious to everyone. With technological acceleration, the distance between what a company is and what it should be has widened. Peter Drucker previously stressed that not only should these incongruities be taken into account when innovating, but so should the opportunities they bring with them:

An incongruity is a discrepancy, a dissonance, between what is and what “ought” to be, or between what is and what everybody assumes it to be. We may not understand the reason for it; indeed, we often cannot figure it out. Still, an incongruity is a symptom of an opportunity to innovate. (Drucker, 2007, p. 51)

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This discrepancy, which Peter Drucker considers an opportunity, can be considered a “window” through which managers, mentors, and coaches can work to change and adapt the organization to new needs, whether defined by globalization, by the COVID-19 pandemic, or by any other circumstance that arises. Recent research has paid attention to the need for changes in soft skills and in the use of words (Boyatzis et. al., 2019) with recommendations that could influence the changes required in today’s forward-looking companies and organizations.

By highlighting the idea of “lifelong learning,” they underline a long-term vision that is far from the short-term opportunism that until recently was seen as the only source of innovation.

Unlike mentoring, which can sometimes last decades, coaching typically involves a shorter time period and a more specific focus. In our work, we focus on an explicit dyadic coaching process, which means that there is a mutual agreement – formal or informal – between coach and coachee that they are participating in a developmental process. Sometimes coaching takes place during predetermined coaching sessions, but it can also occur while walking to or from meetings, at lunch, or in other less formal settings. Note that although the number of professionals using the actual title of “coach” is growing at dramatic rates worldwide, coaching as we use the word also might be an informal or formal advisor, a boss, or a peer (Boyatzis et al., 2019, p. 45)

The word used in formal and informal coaching sessions or in discussions with mentors or managers during their daily work is essential. It is important to highlight the everyday work carried out by mentors in the company that is outside of formal sessions but which helps through reflection and the word.

The effect of the word on management and entrepreneurship leaves no doubt about the need for mentors to advance in the correct use of discussions and conversations in order to bring

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true innovation in companies. The following sentence sums up the actual discussion's essence: "In order to consolidate the discursive dimension within experiential learning, we think that there is a need to better train mentors in oral communication techniques, along with sensitizing managers." (Lefebvre & Riedien-Collot, 2013, p. 370)

At this point it is worthwhile emphasizing that silence, the absence of the word, must also be cultivated by managers, mentors, etc. It seems to be convenient to move away from the stereotype of those (managers or mentors) who always have an explanation, always evaluate, and must always give an opinion. In contrast, silence can be of great help on many occasions and in time people can learn to appreciate this humility, as highlighted in the following interview by the editor-in-chief of *Harvard Business Review* with the CEO of JP Morgan Chase, Jamie Dimon:

You need humility and heart. You don't have to be that good at all the analytical stuff. But if you don't get the best out of your people, you won't succeed. People want to be treated with respect. They have ideas. They want to contribute. Managers have to understand that we don't have all the answers. (Ignatius, 2018, p. 8)

Another important aspect regarding the use of words in business management is the listener. To promote the word as a tool for transformation in a company, sufficient time must be devoted to training in receiving "feedback." It should not be so much a defense or source of debate by those receiving it; rather, whoever receives feedback must know how to reflect, distill the fundamentals, and make the most of it in order to improve the essential arguments. In the training of leaders, negotiation and persuasion techniques are usually studied, but always (or almost always) with the aim of "winning." In contrast, an environment that enhances the word must engage those who receive feedback in learning such skills; it is a factor that can be fundamental in the transformation and innovation of organizations.

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The person who gives an opinion, provides feedback, or evaluates activities must be fair and considerate in substance and form. However, knowing how to capitalize on those conversations and the advice given is important and is something in which we must all make an effort and train ourselves – in how to receive feedback. As professors at Harvard Law School have written, “receiving feedback well is a skill” (Stone & Heen, 2014). Through the word, the great and urgent work carried out by managers, mentors, tutors, and coaches can help people in companies, organizations, and universities to redefine attitudes towards contributing and giving to others (Grant, 2014). At the same time, universities and business schools should promote teaching the word as the best tool for transformation and change.

If one of the urgent issues of our time is the transformation and adaptation of human teams, we urgently need to teach the use of the word as a tool. This is a relevant subject for young people in their early years of training, as well as to those who follow programs within “lifelong learning” schemes. Along with traditional subjects typical of the managerial profession – marketing, finance, strategy, etc. – or other, more recent ones, such as e-commerce, business analytics, or machine learning, it is important to pay attention to the use of the word by using various tools. Education is needed in the use of “power verbs,” as described by Faulkner and Faulkner-Lunsford (2013). These authors confirm the importance of the word for mentors and, by extension, for anyone whose profession is to lead:

Words have the power to affect both the physical and emotional health of people to whom we speak, for better or for worse. Words used to influence are inspiring, uplifting, and challenging. They encourage, motivate, and persuade; they can be visionary; they can change people’s lives for better. Verbal communication is a powerful human instrument and we must learn to use it properly. We need to not only learn to think about speaking in new ways, but also learn to think about language and human nature, psychology, and sociology. (Faulkner & Faulkner-Lunsford, 2013, p. 9)

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## Conclusion

In order for the above ideas to develop positively, it is evident that a good level of motivation must first be achieved by setting interesting goals and presenting them in an attractive way. The philosopher José Antonio Marina, discussing words and motivation, cited the case of the prophet Isaiah, who said, "Give me, Lord, an initiate's language to be able to say a word of encouragement to the afflicted" and reminded us that "Bergson spoke of personalities capable of showing us new possibilities, of eliciting new emotions" (Marina, 2011, p. 29).

We do not have to forget that when professionals were asked what they valued the most in their education, it was crossing paths with leading people that left a deep impression on them. This refers to educators, coaches, and mentors. Their influence was given by the words and silence they administered.

Opening new areas of interest and improvement with the word is of the greatest relevance and also of the utmost importance for the progress of companies and, by extension, of future society. In times of great change, such as the one currently defined by the COVID-19 pandemic and globalization, the use of words and silence is an effective instrument to achieve greater wellbeing for people and organizations. In the workplace, it is important not to forget that organizations are the people who comprise them.

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