

# DOING PHILOSOPHY IN THE CLASSROOM AS COMMUNITY ACTIVITY: A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

One of the most traditional ways to teach philosophy in secondary school is a “historical approach”, which takes a historicist view of philosophy and uses teaching practice based on teacher-centred lessons and textbook study by students. Only recently a debate on different approaches to teach philosophy is developing, considering the discipline as practical and dialogical activity to be fostered in the classroom. What could “doing philosophy” mean in the classroom from an instructional perspective? What are the premises and constraints that allow for the transformation of philosophy from a discipline into a community activity? In this paper a teaching model based on cultural-historical theory is proposed and discussed. The model is composed of three levels of specification of the activity, from lower to higher, which correspond to three different pedagogical structures of philosophical practice in an instructional context. Each level is composed of seven fundamental dimensions that highlight the meanings, the constraints, and the tools implied and developed in philosophizing as socio-cultural activity. Finally, if and how Philosophy for Children should be considered as an activity appropriate to the model and its educational aims is discussed.

Keywords: Activity Model, Teaching Philosophy, Philosophizing

Fazendo filosofia na sala de aula como uma comunidade de atividade: uma abordagem cultural-histórica

## Resumo

Uma das vias mais tradicionais para ensinar filosofia no ensino médio é uma “abordagem histórica”, que adota uma visão historicista da filosofia e usa a prática de ensino baseada em lições centradas no professor e em estudo de textos pelos estudantes. É só recentemente que um debate sobre as diferentes aproximações para ensinar filosofia se desenvolve, considerando a disciplina como uma atividade prática e dialógica a ser levada para a sala de aula. O que poderia significar “fazer filosofia” na sala de aula em uma perspectiva instrucional? Quais são as premissas e exigências que permitem a transformação da filosofia de uma disciplina em uma atividade comunitária? Neste artigo um modelo de ensino baseado na teoria cultural-histórica é proposto e discutido. O modelo é composto por três níveis de especificação da atividade, do mais baixo ao mais alto, que correspondem a três planos de análises diferentes da prática filosófica em contextos institucionais. Cada nível é composto por sete dimensões fundamentais que esclarecem as significações, as limitações, e as ferramentas implicadas e desenvolvidas no filosofar enquanto atividade sociocultural. Finalmente, se e como a Filosofia para Crianças

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doing philosophy in the classroom as community activity: a cultural-historical approach

deveria ser considerada com uma atividade que responde ao modelo, discutindo-se seus fins educacionais.

Palavras-chave: Modelo de Atividade, Ensino de Filosofia, Filosofar

Haciendo filosofía en el salón de clases como actividad comunitaria: una aproximación cultural histórica

Resumen

Una de las vías más tradicionales para enseñar filosofía en la escuela secundaria es el “enfoque histórico” que adopta una visión historicista de la filosofía y usa la práctica de enseñanza basada en lecciones centradas en el profesor y en un estudio de textos por los estudiantes. Solo recientemente un debate sobre diferentes enfoques de la enseñanza de filosofía está desarrollo, teniendo en cuenta la disciplina como actividad práctica y dialógica para ser llevada al salón de clases. ¿Qué podría significar “hacer filosofía” en el salón de clases desde una perspectiva instruccional? ¿Cuáles son las premisas y las exigencias que permiten la transformación de la filosofía de una disciplina en una actividad comunitaria? En este artículo un modelo de enseñanza basado en una teoría cultural histórica es propuesto y discutido. El modelo está compuesto por tres niveles de especificación de la actividad, de menor a mayor, que corresponden con tres planes de análisis diferentes de la práctica filosófica en un contexto educativo. Cada nivel está compuesto por siete dimensiones fundamentales que ponen de relieve los significados, las restricciones y las herramientas implícitas y desarrolladas en filosofar como actividad sociocultural. Por último, se discute si y cómo la Filosofía para Niños debe considerarse una actividad que responde al modelo y sus objetivos educativos.

Palabras claves: Modelo de Actividad, Enseñanza de Filosofía, Filosofar



## DOING PHILOSOPHY IN THE CLASSROOM AS COMMUNITY ACTIVITY: A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

One of the most traditional ways to teach philosophy in secondary school is a historical approach", which takes a historicist view of philosophy and uses teaching practice based on teacher-centred lessons and textbook study by students. The result is that philosophy is learned as abstract knowledge, as theorisation on the world separated from life, as a collection of informative notions, or even as a way of thinking rather than an active process of thinking. Only recently, a debate on different approaches to teaching philosophy has started to grow; this debate considers the subject to be not only a history of philosophical conceptions and theories, but a practical and dialogical classroom activity that should engage students in philosophical reasoning and inquiry. This method should be taken as an opportunity to reflect upon the instructional consequences of philosophy being considered "an activity" rather than "a doctrine" (Wittgenstein, 1953), in a bid to overcome a teacher-centred lesson as the main method of instruction and textbook study as the main source of learning for students. A philosophy-based approach has led to the proposal of curricula developed around philosophical issues and problems; it focuses on a direct approach to philosophical texts, privileging a Kantian *zetetic* method rather than a *dogmatic* one. The aim is to "create philosophy" as a product of cooperative inquiry and learning in the classroom (Strawser, 2005). A review edited by Unesco (*Philosophy: School of Freedom*, 2007) advocates these new directions and approaches, which emphasise the value of philosophical practice in communities, considering them fundamental and relevant to modern society. It is worth noting, however, that considering philosophy as an activity means neither rejecting its historical products, nor separating "know how" (procedural knowledge) from "know what" (declarative knowledge). Instead, it questions the view that philosophy is simply a diachronic doxography of scholars and their ideas and raises it to the level of research, i.e. something that students could use to "learn by doing".

Following these premises, this paper takes philosophy as “doing”, and philosophizing as reflective, meaningful and a process of shared inquiry involving higher-order thinking skills, open-minded styles, as well as creative and critical dispositions. In short, philosophy is treated as a subject that crosses a range of life contexts and knowledge domains.

The need to emphasize the “practical dimension” of philosophizing in teaching and learning philosophy has emerged in many studies over the last few decades. A variety of answers have been put forward to the issue of philosophical agency as a new educational objective. Some scholars have considered it by dealing with philosophy “from the inside”, i.e. in terms of its epistemological *bounds*, ontological *nature* and thematic *contents*. In educational terms, however, this self-referential perspective falls short in its bid to design philosophy teaching and learning as an “inquiry activity” that could be fostered in the classroom as part of the curriculum. This inquiry activity implies evaluating the complex instructional *situations* (Resnick, 1987) in which the experience and practice of philosophical inquiry should be carried out as the main educational activity in the classroom. To this aim, the didactic constraints “outside” the formalization of philosophy should be taken into account. These constraints are student cognition (e.g. learning potential, personal capability, attitude and disposition, interest in the field and knowledge thereof, acquired skills and performance, metacognitive awareness); the features of the instructional setting and community constraints (logistics, physical spaces, relationships, roles, values, scopes, priorities, power distribution, reciprocity); the use of various mediation tools as a means for thinking (material, conceptual, procedural, linguistic, methodological artefacts); the teachers’ beliefs and education; and the evaluation and assessment procedures adopted to promote and foster philosophical understanding in students.

Consequently, some unconventional proposals, such as *Philosophy for Children* (Lipman, 2003), have aimed to promote philosophical inquiry in a classroom community. They start from early “wondering at the world”, which contextualizes philosophical dispositions, abilities and skills within a student’s everyday life and experience. Fostering a student’s questions and problems



acquires relevance and should be considered to be a means that may lead to advancements within philosophy teaching (Gregory, 2007).

### *Philosophy as “inquiry activity”*

In light of the above and taking a pragmatist view of education, when we put forward philosophy as an “activity”, we should therefore consider philosophizing to be a form of *learning by doing*. We focus, in particular, on the inquiry activity and assume that it is a fundamental shared activity within philosophizing. Learning to “do philosophy” thus corresponds to learning by “doing philosophical inquiry” as part of a curriculum’s aims and teaching objectives. In this paper, the utterance “doing philosophy in the classroom” underlines that teaching and learning philosophy are *complex activities performed in instructional situations*.

From an educational perspective, the concept of “activity” is not obvious and needs to be clarified. Most of the daily teaching processes carried out in schools are far from being authentic learning *activities*. The socio-cultural framework and the “Activity Theory” put forward by Vygotsky (1978), Leont’ev (1975, 1981) and other contemporary scholars (Kozulin, 1986) are useful tools and are employed to design a model of philosophical inquiry as the main instructional activity in the philosophy classroom.

One of the main theoretical procedures of the historical and cultural approach is to view *activity* as the fundamental unit of analysis for our understanding and study of cognitive development, especially the states of consciousness and the acquisition of the higher-level intellectual competences which support all scientific and theoretic knowledge. The genesis of human thought and action is an activity, i.e. a social phenomenon, which links subjects and objects within a community. According to Vygotsky, the internalization of activities grounded in society and historically developed is the distinctive characteristic (feature) of human psychology (Vygotsky, 1978). The socio-environmental characterization of activity makes human development the

outcome of processes that are neither linear nor homogenous, but *specific* and *particular*, the aspects of which may be interpreted only once the participants have understood the circumstances and built situation (Rogoff, 1990). Activity Theory elaborates on and points out the main ideas of cultural and historical psychology: *semiotic mediation*, *internalization* and the *zone of proximal development*, which Vygotsky tackles and defines in his remarks on the relationship between thought and language. From his perspective, it is fundamental that priority is given to “verbal thinking” as the “emerging quality” of cognition as consciousness is structured. Activity Theory recognizes and maintains this discursive core as a foundation for intellectual development, suggesting an analysis of cognition which can be summarized in the following essential elements (Dixon-Krauss, 2000):

- Development is a dynamic process among shared activities and not a static product of individual evolution;
- Human activity is directed by intentions, orientated towards aims and fuelled by needs and reasons for action;
- Meaning and aim are integral parts of activity, as are the ensuing interpersonal interactions, the mediation tools involved, and the context within which the action is performed;
- Activity, in its global and complex sense and not in its particular elements (Moll, 1990), is the unity of analysis of human development;
- Activity is a function of culture and of biological heritage.

Assigning a *paradigmatic* value to the social origins of thinking leads to a shift in the focus of traditional research (Axel, 1992) on teaching and learning, as it transforms the social dimension from a “variable” to a “constituent” of cognition. From this perspective, interaction, means and contexts are integral parts of mental processes and what transforms them into thinking. The word *Activity* refers to every “mentalized” human act, namely an intentional action with an aim and cultural significance, rather than an adaptive biological reaction (Kozulin, 1986) or simple responsive behaviours. This view of mental processes as situated and meaningful activities is extended by the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Ogawa, Crain, Loomis & Ball, 2008) from thinking to learning and



development, and we will also extend it to philosophical learning and development. According to CHAT, “learning is the process by which people master and appropriate cultural tools and meanings while engaged in activity. (...) Rather than isolating individual actions from social structure, CHAT acknowledges the many factors that influence the cognitive and social development of people, including the system of social relation that connect individuals”<sup>2</sup>. Activity is thus a dynamic process which emerges and is recognized as the result of a “supra-individual” (Cole, 1996) framework. Within this framework, Engeström (1987) recognizes an *activity system* that encompasses collective and culturally mediated actions comprising six inseparable elements: *object, subject, mediating artefacts, community, rules, and division of labor*. Each is dynamically related to the others in terms of intentions, agency, means, common practice and shared procedures (see the main principles established by Dixon-Krauss [2000] above).

Proposing philosophy as a practical “activity” that can be *done* with students in the classroom as an instructional activity system has strong implications from a teaching methodology point of view. Indeed all the above principles, cognitive resources, socio-environmental constraints and elements have to be activated and maintained in the education system during philosophical activities. In this sense, philosophical thinking is always *situated* within activities. According to the Activity Theory, the development of higher thinking skills and reasoning abilities – such as those involved in philosophical practice – occurs within intentional and meaningful activities which are socially shared and mediated (Rogoff, 1990), transforming the classroom into “communities of philosophical inquiry” (Lipman, 2003).

#### *The structure of the Philosophy Activity Model (PAM)*

The Philosophy Activity Model (PAM) was developed within a socio-cultural framework in accordance with the main principles of the Activity Theory.

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<sup>2</sup> Ogawa, R.T Crain, R. Loomis, M. Ball, T. (2008). *CHAT-IT: Toward a Conceptualizing Learning in the Context of Formal Organizations*, Educational Researcher, 7(2), p. 85.

The purpose was to establish the basic levels of “doing” that transform philosophy teaching and learning into an *activity* carried out within an instructional system. We focused on the model of *inquiry* as the main activity that emerges from philosophizing as shared classroom practice.

In the PAM (Fig. 1), the six elements of the activity system established by Engeström (1999, 2005) were arranged within an instructional activity system (Level 1), i.e. a system structured to foster educational activities based on explicit social demands, specialized teaching offers and assessed learning performance. The model highlights how these elements are mutually constitutive and inextricably connected to the corresponding constituents of philosophical activity (Level 2). Each constituent is arranged within a sub-level of situated classroom *activities* (Level 3), which are characterized by specific instructional “actions” and “operations” (Vygotsky, 1978) designed to optimise students’ philosophical learning and development.

The PAM has three levels used to analyze instructional *doing* and designed to build inquiry activities – from its general constraints to situated features of philosophical inquiry in a classroom setting. The first level of *doing* sets out the general elements to be considered when an inquiry activity is being designed as an instructional process; the middle level of *doing philosophy* is strictly disciplinary and arranges the elements within philosophical inquiry as domain specific activities, recognizable as knowledge field; the last level establishes the meaning of *doing philosophy in the classroom*, namely the elements of the classroom-situated activity.

Fig.1 The Philosophical Activity Model (PAM)



### *The three levels of the model*

**Level 1: "Doing".** According to the Activity Theory, we qualify teaching processes as "doing" only when they are shaped as dynamic, mediated, shared and negotiated actions among the participants in learning situations. In our case, the action which we expect to emerge from the teaching and learning process is "inquiry". The six basic elements which characterize an instructional activity system in PAM are:

- The inquiry activity *subjects*, i.e. school actors, mainly students and teachers, with their biographies, talents, interests, aspirations and difficulties. Their cognitive, metacognitive and motivational dimension in thinking should be taken into account during the activities so that they can be personalized and their intentionality and meaningfulness maintained.

- The inquiry activity *objects*, i.e. the school curriculum, organized into knowledge content and procedures. They are not treated as mere subjects, but as sources of problematic issues, topics to be critically questioned and explored, ideas to be discovered and creatively reconsidered from different points of view.
- The inquiry activity *community*, i.e. the school contexts, classrooms as physical and social space, with the logistics, dynamics and relationships suggested or allowed by the educational system as an expression of the values and expectations of a given society.
- The *mediating artefacts* involved in the inquiry activity, i.e. cultural representations as systems of external signs which broaden, amplify and modify thought, transforming it from within and making it capable of becoming the creator of a new culture. Artefacts are at the same time: symbolic *mediums*, operative and conceptual *tools* (materials, such as paper, pens, cameras and/or psychological tools such as names, categories, symbols, and images) and concrete *works* (Bruner, 1996) produced via semiotic mediation within the context (Wertsch, 1990) and used to carry out activities, such as inquiry. In short: “artefacts (...) shape human activity and allow human beings to shape activity”<sup>3</sup>.
- the inquiry activity *rules*, i.e. the accepted and recognizable constraints, axioms, laws, procedures, models and norms which regulate and legitimize teaching efforts, learning attempts, and the knowledge results of inquiring;
- the *division of labor* during the inquiry activity, i.e. the shared distribution of cognitive charge of exploring, the learning processes of critical and creative thinking that foster intellectual development through comparison, exchange, modelling, apprenticeship, collaboration, reciprocal scaffolding and caring thinking.

Let us consider how this first general level of “doing” inquiry is organized into philosophical inquiry as an activity, namely into the practice of “doing philosophy”.

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<sup>3</sup> Ogawa, R.T et al. (2008), op. cit., p. 86.



*Level 2: "Doing Philosophy"*. The second level of the PAM comprises the six activity elements involved in every inquiry activity system; they are organised into the activity system recognizable as "philosophizing". The elements are:

- The subject of philosophical thinking is the *identity*, who starts the inquiry activity by asking questions such as "Who am I?", "Where I come from?" and "Where I'm going?". The abstract dimension of self becomes embodied in the *identity*, who experiences in her/his life the limits and potential of subjectivity in terms of cognition, emotions and aspirations. Use of the historical and cultural approach, which sees activity as a "form of existence" (Leont'ev, 1977), then doing philosophy as a subjective activity of inquiring, may well be taken as a "way of life" (Hadot, 1987) in which identity is built by means of philosophical practice.
- The *object* of the philosophical inquiry activity becomes *knowledge*, which is the beginning and the end of philosophical thinking. Questions such as "What can I know?" are sources of wonder, doubts and problems that nurture philosophical inquiry. In philosophical inquiry, nothing is given as known and everything has to be re-known, as it passes through the questioning activity. What has been accepted in the common sense and acquired in a culture has to be explored and discovered a new each time, as we need to explicate the implicit assumptions, dogma and prejudices which lie behind beliefs
- The shared dimension of *community* thinking, as expressed in philosophical activity, is *sociality*, which is considered to be an original human disposition and the core of the communal dimension of philosophical inquiry. Questions such as "What must I do?" and "What can I hope?" originate from philosophical inquiry activity when it is immersed in human sociality. Sociality is the communal dimension in which individual duty, hope and pleasure acquire direction, legitimation and limits. The social constituent of philosophical thinking develops into ethics and aesthetics as community frameworks in which moral, political and artistic agency are situated. Sociality, however, is also the concrete activity condition that produces the philosophical experience of the difference, alterity and pluralism of

identities. In this sense, a philosopher's inquiry is never the activity of a hermit, but a "doing of philosophy among philosophers", who are thinking identities involved in a common socially rooted and nurtured practice.

- *Discourse* is the form assumed by language as a means of inquiry activity. Philosophical discourse is used to do philosophical inquiry, wherein common words and cultural signs are employed as mediation artefacts to represent philosophical ideas, events, states and links, which are connected to the objects, facts, feelings and relations of human life. The grammar, syntax, semiotics and semantics of philosophical discourse, which have been developed and codified within the history of philosophy, endow the activity with the inquiry context in terms of a process's directions and a problem's space and constraints.
- *Judgement* is the core of philosophical reasoning as rules-based thinking involved during the inquiry activity. Judgement is what emerges from the shared intellectual procedure adopted to build and test knowledge for logical validity, soundness, acceptability, accountability and coherence. The principles and rules of formal and informal logic are assumed to govern the reasoning process and ensure its prerogative as a judgement oriented activity in a bid to guarantee the correctness and controllability of both the thinking process and its philosophical products. The reasoning activity that produces a philosophical judgement would be considered synonymous with critical thinking, i.e. a form of thinking that is guided by criteria, but one that is also caring and sensitive to the quality of an inquiry.
- The main procedural strategy that *division of labor* uses during a philosophical inquiry is *dialectics*, a communicative and cognitive process adopted during philosophical thinking to evaluate the weight of different positions, distribute the strength of oppositions and optimise the advantage of exchanging perspectives. Dialectics is a generative dynamics from which new ideas and world-views emerge as products of the tension between affirmation and negation processes. Far from being disruptive, the maieutic of dialectics is a source of creative and innovative thinking.



The final step is the contextualization of philosophical inquiry within a classroom, which is to be transformed into a place of philosophical activity.

*Level 3: Doing philosophy in the classroom.* If context is a constituent part of every activity, then “doing philosophy in the classroom” will acquire some unique characteristics when compared with other possible forms of this practice. The classroom—a specific activity system with its own elements, dynamics and relations—becomes an integral aspect of the philosophizing activity which emerges from the teaching and learning process. At the same time, “doing philosophy” is an activity that revolutionizes the classroom. In other words, although an activity changes a context, it is also transformed by the context in which it occurs. In order to establish the correct didactical moves for “doing philosophy in the classroom”, we need to take into account how doing philosophy modifies the classroom while achieving its intrinsic disciplinary aims and, at the same time, how the classroom as an organized activity system determines the specific ways of doing philosophy.

The third level of the PAM comprises six elements of the classroom, seen as a philosophical inquiry activity system. These constituents transform the traditional setting of the philosophy classroom into an activity environment for the shared practice of philosophizing:

*Consciousness* is the highest level of development for subjective activity, in which the *identity* achieves awareness of him/herself as an agent of thinking within his/her own private dimension of reflectivity thanks to the internalization of the social experience of being a self among other selves. Consciousness is a place where higher conceptualizations take place thanks to a collective and collaborative reflecting activity, which is the core process of philosophizing. This process is made possible by the “transplantation” of philosophical culture, language and dispositions into the subject by the transformation of external discourse into internal discourse and by a personal approach to life and problems.

- *Concepts* are what emerge from *knowledge* appropriation, a major philosophical activity that allows what is simply “known” to be

transformed into a concrete “acknowledgement”. *Doing philosophy* as a learning activity implies dealing with specific contents of a theoretical kind (e.g. goodness, justice, truth and beauty) and highly developed modes of thinking (e.g. reflection, analysis, planning, imagination and analogy), which are proposed as objects of reflection and have “to ascend to the concrete”<sup>4</sup>, thanks to inquiry activities mediated by disciplinary language and tools. This implies an understanding of philosophical concepts as part of their historical development, as well as the ability to apply them to new instances of the problems and to manage abstract concepts that are nevertheless a meaningful and true experience of reality. As a result, the content and modes of philosophical knowledge within a culture become an integral part of our mental experience and of our way of organizing and giving meaning to the world and to relationships through philosophical concepts, approaches and perspectives on problems. In other words, *doing conceptual philosophy in the classroom* allows a student’s philosophical intuition to become a philosophical *idea* and substantiates philosophical thought with concrete experience, making it more general and universally oriented. In a few words, nothing is farther from philosophizing than the common prejudice that it deals only with mere abstractions philosophizing deals only with mere abstractions. Conceptualization is a process which allows students to internalize philosophical knowledge, which can be structured as a specific form of cognition used to recognize and solve problems. In this way philosophical concepts coincide with everyday life, emerging as an ideal, but not idealised form of knowledge about reality. This form “is what is most antagonistic to abstraction, and (...) leads back

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<sup>4</sup> The process of “ascending from the abstract to the concrete” refers to the movement of thought in the Hegelian dialectic and it is quite hard to understand if we consider abstract as “formal thinking” and concrete as what is immediately perceived as surface appearance. Common sense finds it rather absurd that a concrete view of reality could be superior to a more abstract one. However, the Hegelian and Marxist idea of concrete to which we refer herein is the one used in the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics of thought, which is embedded in the Vygotskian perspective of human cognitive development. In this perspective, the concrete has to do with the notion of truth and not with a primitive kind of thinking. Ascending from the abstract to the concrete means moving from initial and everyday generalization toward a richer and more accurate view of concrete reality, in which abstraction is filled with a genuine experience of world.



to the concrete”<sup>5</sup>, which students could autonomously apply to their advanced reasoning and reflection upon the world.

- *Democracy* is the pragmatic shape assumed by *sociality* in the classroom, when it is transformed into a place of activity, i.e. into a *community* of philosophical inquiry. Democracy is the social condition of thinking in which differences, possibilities and alternatives meet respect, curiosity and open-mindedness. The link between democracy and inquiry as a social activity is very strong in philosophizing<sup>6</sup>, which is possible only when critical, creative and caring thinking are involved and fostered. In philosophical practice, reasoning with negotiated criteria, imagining alternatives and managing shared values are processes continuously used in a dialogical way and they expose the “universal audience” to the inquiry process and results. Democracy is the form taken by the inter-subjectivity that occurs when people live together in a society, where antithetical perspectives meet and call for a common deliberation. Democracy thus offers a pragmatic solution to these antinomies and could be defined as the shape assumed by community in which sociality of thinking is recognized as a value, need and condition for philosophical inquiry.
- *Meanings* represent the form assumed by philosophical *discourse* when it is used during mediated inquiry activities in the classroom, where words, signs and structures are filled with emotions, relationships, needs and intentions as constitutive elements of the teaching and learning processes. The experience of looking for meaning should be shared with peers, but also with experts in reflective inquiry, e.g. philosophers past and present. Philosophizing in the classroom becomes a real and participative situation characterized by heuristic intentionality and intrinsic motivation in an authentic problematical context. Philosophy is transformed from a product of mere language manipulation in terms of coherence and non-contradiction (Leont’ev, 1996) – only verbal and reproductive knowledge – into situated and generative knowledge (Leont’ev, 1997; Il’ienkov, 1978); it

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<sup>5</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Introduction: The notion of development.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between democracy, philosophy and inquiry is considered in Santi, M. (2007).

becomes “knowledge *of* and *on* something” which provides guidance and information aimed at moving a meaningful agency. Anchoring philosophical inquiry to real needs and aspirations, which are quintessential features of the human condition, means constantly innovating the origin of this practice so that we are forever wondering at the world as we search for meaning.

*Argumentation* is the core process of philosophical inquiry and the core philosophical activity in the classroom, as it is where students are involved in the shared activity of *judging* problems, solutions and possibilities. *Argumentation* is recognizable and constitutive within the public dimension of thinking, reflection and reasoning. It is the communal space in which a multiplicity of perspectives is socialized, criticized, negotiated, shared and fostered to reach sustainable positions. Argumentation is thus viewed as a process, rather than a product or a procedure of thinking. Contradiction, opposition, offers of alternatives, requests for reasons and justifications to support ideas and proposals are common practice in the public sphere of communication and deliberation. Before argumentative mediation manifests itself as an *internal* form of judgement, it is experienced in language in its *external* socialized form as speaking with others. Argumentation is the reasoning technique adopted to co-construct sustainable judgement, i.e. reasonable conclusions which are socially criticisable and sharable. As Kant noted, however, being a “technician of reason”<sup>7</sup> is not sufficient one wishes to practice philosophy, yet without being a technician one cannot do philosophy, i.e. produce philosophical knowledge in the form of rational judgements. *Doing philosophy in the classroom* implies training students to use a philosopher’s “tool-box”, exercising within argumentation specific cognitive instruments, reasoning processes, inquiry techniques and procedures, as well as field content and products within meaningful problematic situations. Philosophical tools, such as logic and argumentation, became tools for amplifying, widening, reshaping, modifying and

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<sup>7</sup> Illetterati, L. (2005). *Between Science and Wisdom. On the Kantian Notion of Philosophy*, Croatian Journal of Philosophy, 15, 487-504. Illetterati notes that the most important and irreducible element of philosophy for Kant is “the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason”, thus “the philosopher is not for Kant simply a technician of reason, in that his aim is not solely that of ability, the completeness of knowledge and its systematic organisation. Rather, he aspires to something which goes beyond the merely cognitive dimension, and that Kant calls ‘wisdom’”.



checking one's modes of knowing and reading reality and existence in its most radical questions. No tool is made to be used just once or in a single way (Wittgenstein, 1972): doing philosophy in the classroom offers multiple possibilities, opportunities and ways to use them within a community of practitioners.

- *Dialogue* is an intrinsic dimension of philosophy as it is a common space for thinking and reasoning, it is also, however, a paradoxical and aporetic constituent of the nature and dynamics of *dialectics*. Philosophizing is a dialogically oriented activity open to communication and positive confrontation, even when dialogue itself is an 'impossible' notion. Conceptually, in dialogue two people take radically opposed stances, yet expect theirs to be recognized and comprehended each other. The aporetic dimension of dialogue, however, is not a paralyzing contradiction, but rather a generative push which nourishes the philosophical process. The only possible resolution to the logical and conceptual impossibility of dialogue lies in pragmatic instances, as they appear in real life as forms of discourse, such as those in common discussions. Discussion is one of the main instances in which dialogue could pragmatically take place as a form of doing philosophy, in which the different roles, styles and dispositions within philosophical inquiry are distributed among participants, and reciprocal teaching and learning are activated. Moreover, through dialogic practices, such as guided discussion in philosophical inquiry communities (Lipman, 2003; Gregory, 2007), the work of a philosopher can be learnt through modelling and witnessing of other practitioners with varying levels of expertise in philosophizing. When doing philosophy "with others", one assumes the responsibility both for personal and the other person's thinking, as each establishes relations of *reciprocity* and *exemplarity*, i.e. each acts as a model and a mirror for the other, modifying self through imitation, revision and contamination between different positions and cognitive styles. *Con-philosophizing*, which recalls Aristotle, is therefore a communal activity in which everyone (De Pasquale, 1994, 1998) is entitled to the chance and right to philosophize, namely the right to answer by

oneself questions of meaning, value and truth, but posing them outside oneself and meeting other selves.

### *Closing remarks and a proposal*

The focus of this paper is the presentation of a model based on a socio-cognitive approach which applies the elements of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory to an instructional context, with its aims, values, features, tools, participants and interest. Transforming philosophy into a teaching and learning activity is the challenge of this study and the aim of the proposed model, which converts the classroom into an activity system with its complex dynamics of student and teacher intentionality, common practices, means, shared procedures, and personal and communal agency<sup>8</sup>. In brief, philosophizing should be part of the school curriculum, as it is a powerful school for freedom, as UNESCO underlined in a recent document<sup>9</sup>.

The PAM focuses on philosophical inquiry as an activity, but it comprises the fundamental constituents to be considered and implemented in every instructional activity that aspires to be a real experience of shared and internalized inquiry for students. The model seems to be particularly useful for designing and constructing a school environment in which activity is the condition of knowledge appropriation, not only in terms of contents, but also of procedures, attitudes and approaches to problems. Lipman's curriculum proposal, his *Philosophy for Children* program, heads in this direction, as Vygotskian learning and development principles are used in a bid to transform the classroom into a "community of inquiry". If and how *Philosophy for Children*<sup>10</sup> complements the structure of the

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<sup>8</sup> The data from a proposal of the first version of the Activity Model to in-service philosophy teachers were presented in Santi M., Giolo R. (2007).

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, *Philosophy. A School of freedom*. Paris: UNESCO, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> *Philosophy for Children*, is a curriculum of philosophical stories and manuals for 6 - 16 year olds developed by Matthew Lipman and his associates at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State College, New Jersey. Lipman's project, following both ancient tradition in Greek Philosophy and the pragmatism of Dewey and Pierce, was to encourage children/citizens to be more reasonable and he saw this as the path to the ultimate goal of education: 'practical wisdom', or good judgment. Lipman emphasized the importance of questioning or enquiry in the development of reasoning, highlighting the role and the link between philosophy, democracy and education. He also appreciated the



PAM, but it seems a feasible start. A “community of inquiry” is, in Lipman’s proposal, an aim, a method, a context, an experience and a condition for doing philosophy in the classroom, in which consciousness, concepts, democracy, meanings, argumentation and dialogue are fundamental constituents of reflective activity. I wish to conclude with this suggestion, which worth exploring.

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historical cultural theory of Vygotsky as regard how we learn to think much as we learn to speak - by internalizing the patterns of speech and thought that we hear around us. Thinking to ourselves is, in effect, borrowing the language of others to talk to ourselves. Putting these educational insights together, Lipman developed a new model of learning - “communities of inquiry” - in which teachers and children collaborate with each other to grow in understanding, not only of the material world, but also of the personal and ethical world around them (Lipman, 2003; Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980, 1985).

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