

THE TEACHER AS A DECODING AGENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL LANGUAGE: A PEDAGOGICAL-PRACTICAL PROPOSAL

O PROFESSOR COMO AGENTE DECODIFICADOR DA LINGUAGEM FILOSÓFICA: UMA PROPOSTA PEDAGÓGICO-PRÁTICA

EL PROFESOR COMO AGENTE DECODIFICADOR DEL LENGUAJE FILOSÓFICO: UNA PROPUESTA PEDAGÓGICO-PRÁCTICA



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ABSTRACT: One of the great challenges in teaching Philosophy lies in the hermetic language often used by teachers and books, which can create barriers between students and philosophical knowledge. This implies that, for effective pedagogical practice, the Philosophy teacher must adapt their language to the audience they are addressing, striving to make complex concepts more understandable. This article suggests that the teacher should act intentionally and strategically as a knowledge mediator and a decodifier of philosophical language, translating it in a didactic way and bringing it closer to students' everyday lives. A literature review was conducted to achieve this goal, and a pedagogical intervention proposal with practical steps was developed for classroom application and teacher preparation. Such a proposal aims to make Philosophy accessible and practical, connecting theory to the students' reality so that, in turn, they may become agents of social transformation.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy. Decodifier. Teacher. Language. Mediator.

RESUMO: Um dos grandes desafios no ensino de Filosofia reside na linguagem hermética frequentemente utilizada por professores e livros, o que pode criar barreiras entre os alunos e o conhecimento filosófico. Isso implica que, para uma prática pedagógica eficaz, o professor de Filosofia precisa adaptar sua linguagem ao público a que se reporta, dedicando-se a tornar conceitos complexos mais compreensíveis. O presente artigo propõe que o docente atue de forma intencional e estratégica como mediador do conhecimento e agente decodificador da linguagem filosófica, traduzindo-a de forma didática e aproximando-a do cotidiano dos estudantes. Para que se alcance esse objetivo, foi realizada uma revisão bibliográfica e desenvolvida uma proposta de intervenção pedagógica com passos práticos para aplicação em sala de aula e na preparação dos professores. Tal proposta visa tornar a Filosofia acessível e prática, conectando a teoria à realidade dos alunos, a fim de que, por sua vez, se tornem agentes de transformação social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filosofia. Decodificador. Docente. Linguagem. Mediator.

RESUMEN: Uno de los grandes desafíos en la enseñanza de la Filosofía radica en el lenguaje hermético que suelen emplear tanto los profesores como los libros, lo que puede generar barreras entre los alumnos y el conocimiento filosófico. Esto implica que, para una práctica pedagógica eficaz, el profesor de Filosofía debe adaptar su lenguaje al público al que se dirige, dedicándose a hacer más comprensibles los conceptos complejos. El presente artículo propone que el docente actúe de manera intencional y estratégica como mediador del conocimiento y agente decodificador del lenguaje filosófico, traduciéndolo de manera didáctica y acercándolo al día a día de los estudiantes. Para alcanzar este objetivo, se realizó una revisión bibliográfica y se desarrolló una propuesta de intervención pedagógica con pasos prácticos para su aplicación en el aula y en la formación de los profesores. Tal propuesta busca hacer la Filosofía accesible y práctica, conectando la teoría con la realidad de los alumnos, para que, a su vez, se conviertan en agentes de transformación social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Filosofía. Decodificador. Docente. Lenguaje. Mediator.

Introduction

Since Ancient Greece, it has been known that the teaching and learning of philosophy is fundamental for the development of critical and reflective thinking, as well as for the construction of a more just, prosperous, and humane society. Reflection on essential questions relating to existence, knowledge, ethics, and logic promotes the ability to analyze reality and argue in a structured and coherent way. Philosophy encourages us to examine our own beliefs and values, as well as to understand and respect different perspectives. In this way, philosophical teaching contributes to the formation of more aware and participative citizens, as well as improving essential skills for various areas of knowledge and everyday life.

Despite its immense importance, however, learning philosophy is not always effective, for various reasons. It is common, for example, for this discipline to be seen by the public as an accessory, dispensable knowledge, boasted of only by an intellectual elite that likes to "talk tough". In view of this, it is essential to reflect on the causes of such disinterest and the difficulties that prevent people, especially primary school students, from really understanding and assimilating philosophical content, so that, from this reflection, it is possible to point out solutions to the problem.

As Cesar notes, "Philosophy teaching in Brazil has been problematic and, although many problems have been solved, it still faces difficulties" (Cesar, 2012, p. 1, our translation). One of the main obstacles encountered by young people and adults when learning philosophy is the hermetic language used by teachers and books. The impression is often created that philosophy is something inaccessible, and it often seems that complex vocabulary is used and deep and intricate thoughts are elaborated to demonstrate erudition. Since philosophy is a challenging field, with deep themes such as metaphysics and ethics, the use of hermetic language creates a barrier between students and philosophical knowledge. Therefore, in order to promote productive teaching, philosophy teachers need to learn to adapt their language to the target audience, making a sincere effort to translate complex concepts into a language that everyone can understand. The challenge increases when you consider what Gallo says:

A general didactic approach cannot cover philosophy teaching, it cannot be addressed solely as a pedagogical issue, because there is something specific about philosophy. There is something that makes Philosophy Philosophy [...], and it is this something that makes the teaching of Philosophy also need a philosophical treatment, a specific didactic, beyond any strictly pedagogical question (Gallo, 2020, n.p., our translation).

However, the challenge lies not only in the teacher's efforts to simplify the vocabulary and the way of explaining. It is also necessary to decode the classical philosophical works, many of which, if not most, have almost impenetrable modes of expression, either because of the distance in time they are from us, or because the authors themselves express themselves in an esoteric way, that is, close to the circle of initiates, those who already have a certain philosophical knowledge to understand their works. This decoding takes place even before the teacher dedicates himself to preparing his lessons. In fact, it's important to have initiatives to popularize philosophy, by producing teaching materials that summarize the thinking of the main authors as much as possible, extracting the essence of each one and making it as palatable as possible. This pre-digested material, so to speak, must be in the hands of the teachers, who, armed with it, must, in turn, seek the most didactic preparation possible and present the assimilated content clearly. In this process, it is essential that teachers develop some personal skills, of a cognitive and communicative nature, in order to improve themselves, both as students and as teachers.

Below, based on bibliographical research, as well as the authors' experience and reflection, we will outline, in the form of a pedagogical intervention proposal, some fundamental steps in the teacher's journey to prepare to translate philosophical language to students, thus becoming a pedagogical mediator of this knowledge.

Philosophy teacher preparation: strategies and attitudes

It could be said that the answer to the question "What is expected of the philosopher when it comes to teaching philosophy?" is the same, refers directly "to the formative experience necessary for the ways of doing philosophy in the classroom, at the center of which is the mastery of the topics to be covered and the methodology to be used for teaching them" (Gelamo, 2009, p. 27, our translation). Therefore, the fundamental and initial point in the process of decoding philosophical language for students has to do primarily with the teacher's training, from elementary to advanced.

The ability to interpret text, for example, is the first thing that teachers need to work on. They should not limit themselves to reproducing what they heard from their teachers during college, which they often did poorly, unfortunately, due to the poor education offered in many educational institutions today, which are focused solely on obtaining the students' tuition fees.

Despite sometimes insufficient training, teachers need to seek out knowledge for themselves, without neglecting to read the primary sources, the classics that form the basis of philosophical thought.

Although today, there is immense ease of access to content *online* and often ready-made lessons that teachers can absorb directly from the internet, it takes effort and intellectual honesty for teachers to be aware of their moral duty to seek out the purest knowledge to share with their students. Thus, going to primary sources and making an effort to interpret and decode them in terms and elements that are simpler and more assimilable for oneself and, consequently, for the students is essential, and is a fundamental tool in the teaching-learning process.

Once the teacher has trained his or her ability to read the first sources and interpret them properly, they need to move on to the second step, which is to systematize and organize all the information assimilated, which is often an undefined mass of concepts, because authors usually write following the flow of their ideas. This systematization must be carried out by organizing and synthesizing the information, and can be done by means of drafts, outlines, summaries, etc.

After this process and after making sure that the information is clear in his mind, so that he can reproduce it easily, the teacher should move on to the next step, which should be to think about how he will transmit the information to the students. The basic guiding assumption needs to be that the students don't know as much as the teacher, even if they do. This will help the educator to be as didactic as possible and always start from the known to the unknown.

In this procedure, it is important for the teacher to identify elements in the students' reality that serve as a bridge, a point of contact with the topics to be taught. Situations from the daily lives of young people and adolescents should serve as a hook for the philosophical information to be presented. Matos describes well the state of students when they find no link between their reality and philosophy teaching:

Students who are restless and curious about themselves, what they are being and what they might become, the world that houses them, and the time/space in which they exist are sometimes ignored in their concreteness for the benefit of our well-intentioned philosophical alphabet (Matos, 2015, p. 372, our translation).

Another critical point is to always remember that teaching philosophy doesn't just consist of pouring a lot of knowledge about author A or B into the student. Above all, it consists of teaching students to think, reason, analyze, and, in other words, philosophize for themselves.

The didactic tools that the teacher will use to achieve the objective of transmitting the

philosophical content reliably and, at the same time, in a pedagogical way are diverse and can be adapted according to need. Audiovisual and multimedia resources are just some of the ways in which teachers can creatively present knowledge. It is good and desirable that, in the highly technological and multi-sensory age in which we live, we do not dispense with the use of tools that appeal to the senses, through which the student can grasp the initially theoretical message of philosophy in a more concrete way, in colors, sounds, and sensations.

Another thing teachers shouldn't forget is the maxim "involve me, and I will learn," attributed to Benjamin Franklin, an 18th-century American polymath. Students need to feel part of the process, incorporated into the subject, and the subject into them. In other words, they need to feel that the subject of philosophy has practical relevance to their daily lives, to the challenges they face in their daily lives, and to the dilemmas of their social condition. In this regard, it is up to the teacher to create hypothetical situations, similar to math problems, in which the student is forced to use the logical and cognitive tools provided by Philosophy in order to solve the situation they are confronted with. Medeiros' words justify the importance of this:

The attitude of philosophizing is fundamental to lifelong learning. In education, at all levels, reference to knowledge, skills, competence, values, and attitudes is fundamental. You have to know how to work with all of this in a balanced and interconnected way (Medeiros, 2019, p. 97, our translation).

This involvement will make philosophy not just a cold, distant, and hermetic subject that makes students think as many do about the famous Bhaskara formula: "What's it for? In what situation in my life am I going to use it?" By seeing philosophy intertwined with real-life situations and by realizing that this discipline can somehow contribute to resolving personal and social conflicts, students will experience a renewed interest, and their thirst for knowledge will be stimulated.

In this context, it is worth promoting productive teacher-led debates in which students are guided through a process of self-discovery of their opinions, depth of thought, and argumentative capacity. A successful experience, for example, consists of dividing the class into two groups and proposing the discussion of a controversial topic involving ethical dilemmas, a possible dichotomy. At first, one of the groups is asked to defend one of the points of view on the spectrum, while the other group argues in favor of the opposite point. After this first moment of debate, the positions are asked to be reversed, and the group that previously defended one position now defends the opposite point of view. Obviously, this will generate a

certain identity crisis at first because it follows the sophist mode of argumentation, in which what is important is not necessarily the truth, but the way of arguing and winning the debate. However, this has the positive effect of promoting empathy, the ability to put oneself in the other person's shoes, and respect for other people's opinions, which are fundamental values for a society guided by philosophical principles.

In addition to the debate, the challenge for students to do their own research and try to summarize the thinking of certain philosophers in a simpler way will allow them to make what is complexly palatable in the process of summarizing. It is a fact that sometimes, or even often, it will be difficult, in some cases almost impossible, to decipher the philosophical language of the classical authors, as well as their commentators. However, the simple effort to understand something, the exercise of the ability to interpret and synthesize, will be worthwhile and will prepare the student to reach higher levels in the process of learning philosophy. Not to mention that the teacher must bring the proper interpretation of texts into the classroom, without disregarding or devaluing the students' particular efforts and perceptions.

Another resource that philosophy teachers can and should use are related subjects that have an affinity with philosophy, such as literature, history, sociology, and the arts, among others. Considering that Philosophy can be called "the mother of all sciences", since it was the trunk from which all other scientific branches derived, it is not difficult to establish links with other areas of knowledge. This collaboration, as well as making learning such a dense subject more accessible, allows connections to be made that are essential to illustrate and fix the content in students' minds.

With the help of Literature, for example, it is possible to explore and approach period texts to identify traces of the dominant philosophy, of the "spirit of the time" (*Zeitgeist*) (Hegel, 2008) in which a particular work was written. Imagine, for example, reading Machado de Assis while exploring the philosophical currents that influenced the writer's thinking, as well as the ideas and concepts of his characters. Consider, too, how productive it is to turn to Sociology, a sister discipline of Philosophy, to examine and discuss the problems of today's society. It's also interesting to remember history and art, the phases of time and thought, and cultural manifestations.

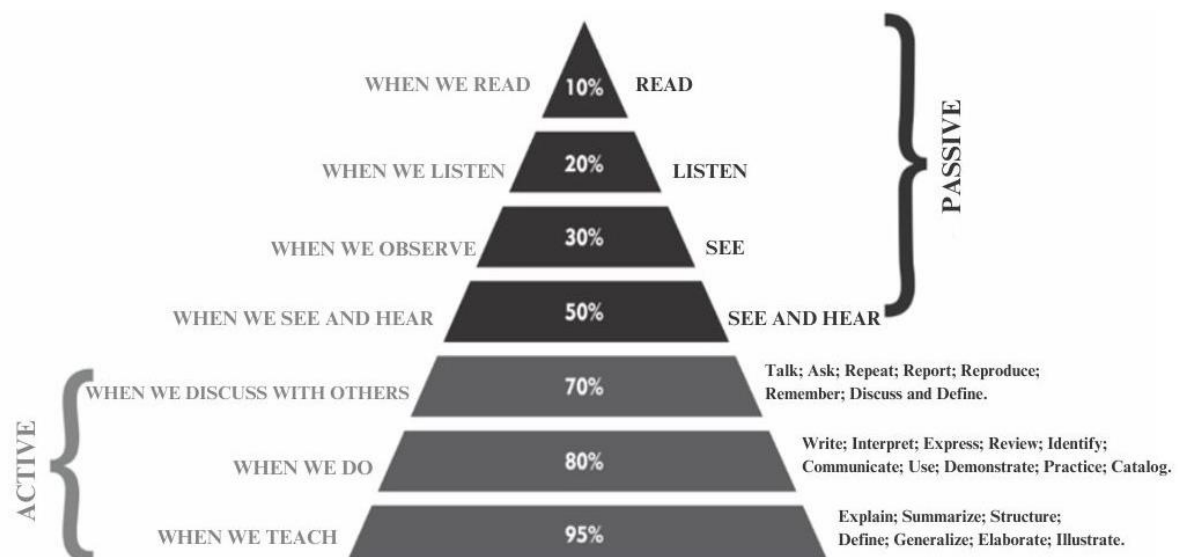
All this interdisciplinarity is fundamental and essential for the philosophical content to unfold into a tapestry of knowledge and applicability for the student. In this way, the student, without realizing it, is involved in a support network that unites teachers and disciplines, different areas of knowledge and living, in order to organically build knowledge that will not

merely be reproduced in tests, but will be taken into life.

Final stage: turning theory into practice

The next step in the process of assimilation of Philosophy by the student is to transpose theory into practice, which can be translated into the verbs *to do* and *to teach*. As can be seen in Figure 1, the famous pyramid of learning, which reflects the conceptions of the American psychiatrist William Glasser, learning becomes more effective as it turns from practice to action. It is, therefore, necessary for the teacher to occasionally plan activities of a practical nature with their students, such as interventions in the community based on the concepts explored in the area of ethics. In addition, it can promote situations in which students themselves take on the role of teacher or, more precisely, mediator of philosophical knowledge, directing these interactions to other students or members of the community.

Figure 1 - Glasser's Pyramid



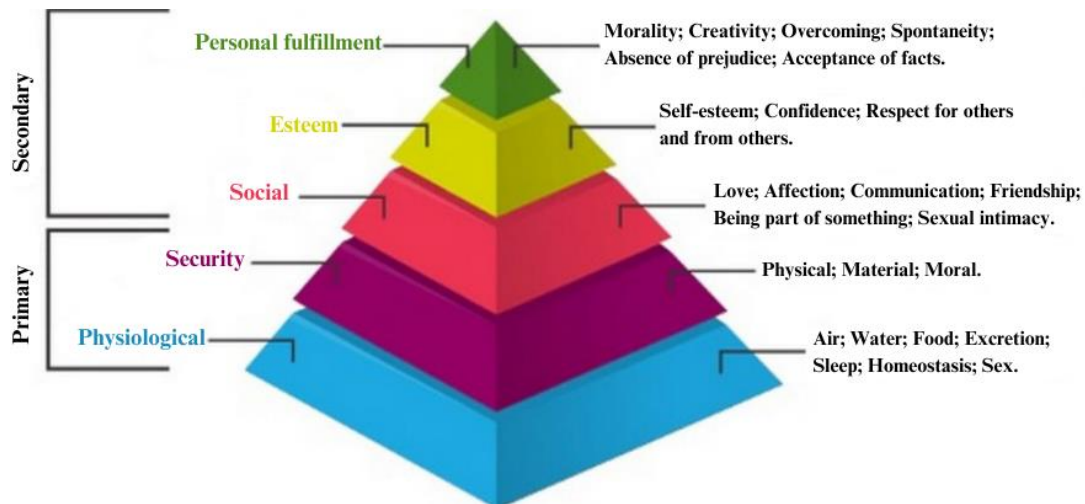
Source: Trevisan (2022, p. 7).

Regardless of the means by which this is done, students need to be encouraged to reproduce what they have learned and to pass on the content of their recent acquisition so that their philosophizing can find expression through conscious action in the direction of sharing with others. In other words, the student's personhood as a thinking being, in his or her individuality, will be constructed in the manifestation of their otherness in the act of transmitting the knowledge obtained in class or in books to the other (be it a colleague, relative, neighbor, etc.). This transposition from philosophy as a merely theoretical object, restricted to

the "world of ideas" to practice and as an instrument of social transformation, is a revolution, a "Copernican turn" in the way philosophy has been treated over the decades, especially in schools. Such a revolution is necessary if we want to see our students as thinking and creative beings, not merely reproducers of other people's views. This is the basis of a sustainable society and the foundation for an education that will produce tangible social results in the short, medium, and long term.

From this perspective, another equally important pyramid for our study is that of Abraham Maslow (Figure 2), which, although not designed by this American psychologist, was based on his so-called "hierarchy of needs", presented in the 1943 article "*A theory of human motivation*" (A theory of human motivation). The scheme became known for didactically outlining how the logic of human priorities works according to our needs. In short, Maslow's Pyramid organizes human needs into a hierarchy, with the most basic at the bottom (physiological and safety) and the most complex at the top (esteem and personal fulfillment). According to this theory, people only focus on a higher level when the needs of the lower level(s) are satisfied. This notion is useful for understanding human motivation and behavior in various areas, such as *marketing*, education and human resource management.

Figure 2 - Maslow's Pyramid



Source: Rosenberg (2015).

As already mentioned, students will only give real value to philosophical knowledge if it is intertwined with the real situations of their daily lives. Students need to be made to understand how philosophy is useful in meeting their hierarchy of needs. By offering reflections on fundamental questions of human existence, philosophy can help individuals find answers to their deepest concerns. At the most basic level, philosophical discussions about ethics and morality can guide students in their search for security and belonging. Philosophy also promotes the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, which are essential for self-knowledge and personal growth. By understanding how philosophical theories apply to their lives, students can find ways to achieve self-actualization, the top of Maslow's pyramid. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate philosophy teaching with practical and contextualized experiences, so that students realize its direct relevance in their lives and find the motivation to explore its concepts and applications in greater depth.

By mediating this process, and presenting the advantages resulting from philosophical reflection, the teacher actually becomes a messenger of knowledge, truly interested in the well-being of his students; someone who undertakes an effort analogous to that of Prometheus in mythology, who steals fire (philosophical knowledge) from Olympus (the inaccessible pedestal of professional philosophers) to deliver it to human beings (students who lack philosophy in its simplest and purest form)³. Another applicable analogy is that of the Myth of the Cave, in which

³ Prometheus, in Greek mythology, is known as the titan who defied the gods by stealing divine fire and giving it to mortals, making human progress possible. For this act of rebellion, he was punished by Zeus, who chained him to a rock where an eagle devoured his liver every day, only to regenerate it at night in an eternal cycle. For more information, see Sears (2015).

the teacher resembles the one who, coming out of the cave, experiences the wonders of the world of light and returns to the cave to share what he has learned. Unlike those in the cave who resist accepting enlightenment, students properly captivated by the beauty of philosophical reflection will certainly embrace with joy the opportunity to apply in their life knowledge that can transform their reality⁴.

Final considerations

In summary, this proposal for a pedagogical intervention to popularize and democratize the teaching of Philosophy in schools can be summed up as follows:

The teacher must be fully aware of the need to decode the hermetic language of philosophy and its highly complex concepts into the reality of the student, so that they can understand it at their level and in a way that makes sense for their life. It's up to the teacher to start the journey with their ability to interpret philosophical texts and extract their essence for themselves, organizing the information in such a way that it makes sense to them and others.

This organization should follow a systematic and objective line, taking creative routes that help the content to stick. Next, teachers must devise strategies to apply the content to their students' reality so that philosophy is not something distant but present in their lives.

This often requires the use of various resources that serve as tools to enhance the teaching and learning process. Involving students in this process is essential, making them see philosophy in their social reality and as citizens. Events such as debates and interventions in the community are always welcome. Furthermore, interdisciplinarity is a resource that effective teachers should not do without to broaden their teaching scope.

Providing students with practical activities that enable them to pass on their learned content is indispensable in the learning process. Being attentive to the students' most basic needs and trying to meet them through the practical application of philosophy, as well as awakening in the students the sense that they themselves need philosophy, is another fundamental step towards the effective assimilation of the content.

Finally, the teacher must act intentionally, presenting the advantages and well-being of

⁴ In the Myth of the Cave, found in Plato's *The Republic*, the philosopher describes a group of people who spend their lives chained up inside a cave, watching only shadows cast on the wall in front of them. These shadows are all they know of the world until a prisoner is freed and, on leaving the cave, discovers the true reality outside, illuminated by the light of the sun. He returns to the cave to tell the others, but they don't believe him and resist the idea of abandoning their beliefs. The myth represents the journey of knowledge, from the world of appearances to that of ideas, and highlights the importance of education and critical thinking to achieve a proper understanding of reality. For more information, see Kleinman (2014).

knowledge and wisely insisting that the thirst for knowledge is awakened in the students. Throughout this procedure, the teacher acts as the great mediator, articulator, and key player between the world of theory and their students' real, everyday experience. Ultimately, this allows students to become agents of social change through philosophical reflection on the issues that affect their reality.

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