

# CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCRATIC MAIEUTIC TO DIALOGICAL EDUCATION

## Aportes de la mayéutica socrática a la educación dialógica

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### Abstract

Education has a vast history that has made it go through different epistemological, pragmatic, and ontological positions, enriching its theoretical and practical heritage. Philosophy is, among others, one of the sciences in which education has supported to think on its being and doing. Especially, one of these currents basis is the philosophical thought on dialogue, which has helped to strengthen the trend of dialogical education both from its contribution and from its criticism, aspects inherent to philosophical reflection. However, this trend of education has not sufficiently considered the position of Socratic maieutic in its reflection. For this reason, this article aims to propose some elements for dialogical education from the study of Socratic maieutic, for which a qualitative approach and hermeneutic methodology is used. The main results of the research show that dialogical education broadens its horizon from the Socratic assumptions of maieutic in two aspects: in the first place, maieutic invites to recover the question and the ability to ask oneself, and, secondly, it demonstrates that knowledge, to be significant, must be a conquest and discovery of the student himself mediated by dialogue with himself, with others and with the other.

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### Keywords

Maieutic, Socrates, dialogue, dialogical education, truth, question.

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### Resumen

La educación tiene una vasta historia que la ha hecho transitar por diferentes posturas epistemológicas, pragmáticas y ontológicas, situación que ha enriquecido su acervo teórico y práctico. La filosofía es, entre otras, una de las ciencias en las que se ha apoyado la educación para reflexionar sobre su ser y su hacer. Especialmente, uno de estos sustentos actuales es el pensamiento filosófico sobre el diálogo, que ha ayudado a fortalecer la corriente de la educación dialógica tanto desde su aporte como desde su crítica, aspectos inherentes a la reflexión filosófica. Sin embargo, es evidente que esta corriente de la educación no ha considerado lo suficiente la postura de la mayéutica socrática en su reflexión. Por ello, este artículo tiene como objetivo proponer unos elementos a la educación dialógica desde el estudio de la mayéutica socrática, para lo cual se utiliza una metodología de enfoque cualitativo y de corte hermenéutico. Los principales resultados de la investigación muestran que la educación dialógica amplía su horizonte desde los supuestos socráticos de la mayéutica en dos aspectos particulares: en primer lugar, la mayéutica invita a recuperar la pregunta y la capacidad de preguntarse, y, en segundo lugar, demuestra que el conocimiento para ser significativo debe ser una conquista y un descubrimiento del propio estudiante mediado por el diálogo consigo mismo, con los otros y con lo otro.

### Palabras clave

Mayéutica, Sócrates, diálogo, educación dialógica, verdad, pregunta.

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## Introduction

Education is a science as old as the human being, and hence it has different perspectives in different times to achieve its goal. Education is continually relying on other sciences to bring them into the teaching and learning process, a situation that has enriched its theoretical and practical acquis.

One of the horizons from which the educational reflection has been nourished is that of the dialogue, a wide historical and epistemological position, since it is a topic of interest from different aspects of the thought such as psychology (Vygotsky, 1993) and philosophy (Buber, 1977; Gadamer, 1998; Habermas, 1992; 1999; Rawls, 2006; Taylor, 1993). From the point of view of philosophy, Plato's way of writing is classic, and in many cases his writings were done through dialogues, where one of his main characters was Socrates. Currently, from the philosophical point of view, there are three tendencies around the theory of dialogue, which are dialogic ethics, phenomenological tradition and hermeneutic tradition (Velasco and Alonso, 2009).

Education has benefited from these different strands of philosophy as far as dialogic reflection is concerned. In dialogical education, however, not enough attention has been paid to Socratic Maieutics. This does not mean that the Socratic "method" is totally forgotten in the learning process, as shown by the relevance given to it by Bakhtin (1981, 1984) in his thinking. Evidently, there have been both theoretical and empirical

research that account for the application of Socratic dialogue in formal education, showing its benefits and limitations (Sullivan *et al.*, 2009) and reflections on how to improve teaching and learning with Socratic educational strategies (Giuseffi, 2022a). However, little is studied in maieutics in education, and particularly in education or dialogic teaching.

This may be due to the fact that the Socratic method is not considered by some as really dialogic (Matusov, 2009), although this vision, if analyzed carefully, may be unfair with the nature of the Maieutics (Giuseffi, 2022b), without ignoring with it, as Bakhtin (1984) argues, that the Socratic dialogue was increasingly becoming Plato more in a way to share a monological vision of reality, the Platonic one, losing its objective.

However, this work does not intend to justify whether or not Socrates used the method properly, because it is well known that Socrates is known by the ethnographic role of Plato (Matusov, 2009), since he left nothing written, which is why the Socratic maieutics is transitioned from the intentionality of Platonic thought and worldview, particularly the conception of truth as Heidegger (2007) states in his book *On the essence of truth*, where he deals on the parable of the Cavern and the fruit of Plato, from his lessons of the winter semester of 1931/132 at the University of Freiburg.

Therefore, this research focuses on Socrates' description of the maieutics in Teeteto's dialogue (Plato, 1988), because, although it is common to speak of the socratic maieutics in a general way, it is in this text that its meaning and scope are explicitly exposed, as the scholar of the ancient philosophy Marcelo Boeri asserts in his introduction of the translation he makes of this dialogue (Plato, 2006). Once this description is made, it is intended to indicate the contributions of this Socratic method for current dialogic education.

This discussion is relevant given the new challenges that brings the knowledge taught to learn, because one of the ways the human being learns is through dialogue and it is precisely Socrates one of the thinkers who emphasized this way of teaching through his art maieutics. Today, it is required that education focuses its efforts on aspects that can be recovered from Socratic Maieutics, such as the promotion of critical thinking, since maieutics generates the ability for students to question and rigorously analyze knowledge. It also promotes communication skills, as this method motivates the student to express their ideas and views on a particular issue. Likewise, it fosters respect and empathy, because the diversity of points of view is valued to build together the truth.

The aim of this paper is to propose some elements to dialogic education from the study of socratic maieutics, using a qualitative approach

and hermeneutic cut, i.e., the main documentary source will be, on the one hand, the text of Teeteto, taking as a guide the translation made by Álvaro Vallejo Campos published by Gredos editorial (Plato, 1988), without neglecting other interpretations such as that of Marcelo Boeri (Plato, 2006) and that of Cornford (2007). In turn, this study is hermeneutical, particularly Gadamerian (Gadamer, 1998), starting from the conversational position to enrich horizons, i.e., it will enter to dialogue dialogic education with the socratic maieutics trying to find elements that this can contribute to that one.

The text has the following structure: some theoretical references of the philosophy of dialogue, of dialogic education and of the socratic maieutics are discussed; after that, the elements of the socratic maieutics that can expand the horizon of reflection of dialogic education are shown.

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## Theoretical framework

In order to contextualize the contributions made by the socratic maieutics to the current discussion of dialogic education, it is necessary to delimit what is understood, firstly, by the philosophy of dialogue, secondly, by dialogic education and, finally, by socratic maieutics. Therefore, in this section, these concepts are developed using primary and secondary sources of the main thinkers involved in the development of these categories.

### *Philosophy of dialogue*

The philosophy of dialogue has had an increasing boom, without ignoring with it that the category is not new in philosophy, since it is well known, for example, the role that dialogue occupied in Plato's philosophy. Therefore, today we speak of a "re-emergence" of dialogue in philosophy, due to the reflection based on the dialogue of thinkers such as Habermas (1992, 1999) in his theory of communicative action, Gadamer (1988) in his thought on conversation and Rawls (2006) in his theory of justice.

González (2012) says that there is an idealization of this category not only in philosophy, but also in other human sciences and in the pedagogical, therapeutic and organizational intervention procedures. However, there is no "systematization" nowadays of this category, which is why Mendes-Flohr (2015), when analyzing the contemporary reception of Buber's philosophy, speaks of dialogue as a trans-disciplinary concept.

However, without ignoring the various aspects regarding this aspect of philosophical thought, it can be generalized saying that the phi-

osophy of dialogue is centered on the nature of the dialogue itself and the role of it in human life through communication and interaction. This thinking is based on the idea that the human being is a relational being.

Another issue that explain this category is its etymology, since the concept dialogue has the Greek particle *lóma* (*logos*), a rather controversial and polysemic term. However, as García Peña (2010) says, it is not possible to fall into the historical injustice of translating this word into Spanish for “rationality”, a translation that has prevailed in the West. It cannot be forgotten that it was Aristotle (1988) who argued that the human being is a being endowed with *logics*, i.e., capable of language, with all that this concept implies, which, among other things, refers to the person in its entirety and is what singularizes it making it different from other beings.

Dialogue has borne this historical injustice of translation as “rationality”, that is why Buber (1977)—considered one of the fathers of the philosophy of dialogue, not because he would have been the first to use the category, but because he was one of the first to argue the dialogic principle in the human being—argued that dialogue must be rethought, because this is not an accidental question to the person, but it is the one that makes it what it is and what it can become.

Buber argued that there were two ways to understand dialogue. On the one hand, according to the Jewish philosopher, there was the technical dialogue used as a means for a certain purpose, for example, in a commercial negotiation or in a political debate, without ignoring that it can also be used in the relationship with people, where an impersonal relationship is given and is treated as an object from which useful information can be obtained, without recognizing the other itself. On the other hand, there is the authentic dialogue, which comes from the meeting of two people open and willing to let themselves be transformed by the encounter. This type of dialogue “I-You” requires openness and disposition, overcoming the drawbacks of selfishness and objectification of the other as a mere instrument. Therefore, this type of dialogue gives real relationships, as long as it promotes empathy and mutual responsibility.

This Buberian conception of dialogue has influenced different fields, within which is the field of education, and which is relevant for the subject of this research, because the other in education should not be taken as an instrument, but must be recognized in their own circumstances, hence requiring the participation of teachers and professors with an attitude of openness to let themselves be carried away by the unexpected paths to which the authentic dialogue leads. These assumptions, among others, have encouraged dialogic education, which is the topic that will be discussed below.



## *Dialogic education*

Dialogical education reflects on dialogue from different points of view of knowledge to think about education both in its being and in its doing; therefore, the discussion about its origins goes from one side to the other. What is true, as argued by Mercer *et al.* (2019), is that dialogic education has its roots in the tradition of oral education, which is why Socrates is often credited as its creator. However, there are those who consider, like Matusov (2009), that the Socratic rather than dialogic practice was coercive and intimidating, and therefore could not be classified in dialogism itself.

When talking about the first explicit approach to dialogue in education, the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1970) is considered as a pioneer, since he proposes a dialogic theory of education, which has made him worthy, according to Fernández-Cárdenas and Reyes-Angona (2019), to be the most influential thinker in the historical development of dialogic perspectives in education in Latin America.

It is evident, then, that dialogic education is not an indigenous construction, since, according to Gutiérrez-Ríos (2017), there is influence from different thinkers. However, Lyle (2008) argues that the influence of Vigotsky and Bakhtin in any discussion that focuses on dialogue-based learning is undeniable, so these thinkers are references when addressing dialogic discussion in education. The literature alluding to these thinkers accounts for this.

In addition, as Asterhan *et al.* (2020) recall, dialogic education receives interest from other areas such as psychology, pedagogy, ethnography, linguistics and philosophy, which is reflected in the literature resulting from research on this particular subject (Maine and Čermáková, 2021). Indeed, the natural consequence of this proliferation of reflections on dialogic education is that there is a need for systematization.

Consequently, all this has led to attempts in recent decades to systematize dialogic education through works such as Burbules (1999), showing dialogue as a form of pedagogical communication; Wells (1999), based on the concept of the near development zone of Vygotsky; Mercer and Littleton (2007), who highlight the importance of dialogue for the intellectual development of children; and Alexander (2006), who highlights how dialogic teaching harnesses the power of conversation to stimulate children's thinking.

Likewise, we cannot ignore the joint efforts to deepen the subject as is the *International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education*, directed by Mercer *et al.* (2019), as well as the publications of magazines dedicated



to reflect on this topic as *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*. All this accounts for the relevance of dialogic education today.

Particularly, a seminal reference on the subject is Alexander (2006; 2010; 2018; 2020), who assures that there is no single and consensual definition of what dialogic education is, which is consistent under the assumption of the liberality of dialogue. However, the author argues (2018), that there are elements that intertwine with a reasonable coherence from different perspectives of thought such as psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, neuroscientific, philosophical and pedagogical. Therefore, trying not to limit that it is a characteristic of every definition, he argues that dialogic education connotes “a pedagogy of the spoken word that is manifestly distinctive based on widely accepted evidence and on discourses and assumptions that have much in common” (Alexander, 2018, p. 562).

Additionally, in a text where he talks about the essential points of dialogic education, Alexander (2010) clarifies three things of what dialogic education *is not*. Firstly, he argues that dialogic education is not only about speaking and listening, but also takes into account the integral approach of teaching and learning, based on research on language, learning, thinking and understanding. Secondly, he clarifies that it is not just communication skills. Finally, he asserts that it is not only a teaching method, but also a professional approach and perspective that requires a rethinking of techniques, the relationships that exist in the classroom, the balance of power between the teacher and the student and the way in which knowledge is conceived.

Indeed, the current interest in this educational approach is undeniable, reaching radical positions, such as Matusov’s (2009), who holds that all education is dialogic, for which it is required to differentiate between the ontological and instrumental approach in dialogic education. In this sense, it is important to remember the maxim of the German philosopher Gadamer (2001), who stated the following: “I believe that one can only learn through conversation” (p. 529), without claiming that he is a representative of dialogical education in the terms set out here, but who is, undoubtedly, a reference from hermeneutics when addressing the topic of dialogue.

It is also important to emphasize that this dialogic current in education is a direct criticism of the monological perspective, proposing a whole paradigm shift, becoming a challenge, according to Yang and Wang (2022), for traditional education based on the monism of meaning, the argument of authority and the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student.



Its effects are strong. As mentioned by Alexander (2020), there is evidence of how and why dialogic education is good for students and teachers and has been shown, according to Omland and Rødnes (2020), how conversations manage to create better scenarios of learning and reasoning, all based on the psychology of education according to which social interactions have an important role in learning (Yang and Wang, 2022). However, the problems of dialogic teaching (Sedova *et al.*, 2014) cannot be ignored either, especially when it is taken solely as a method (Alexander, 2010) or as an instrument (Matusov, 2009).

### *Socratic maieutics*

The description of Socratic maieutics will be taken from the Teeteto de Plato dialogue (1988), since according to Silva Irrarázaval (2007) it is the work where more details are given about this art (τέχνη) of Socrates. It is necessary to know that this dialogue, as Zucca (2022) argues, is one of the most discussed and controversial in the Platonic *corpus*. Also, from the literary point of view, authors such as Vallejo Campos (2020) and González (2022), consider that this text is difficult to interpret, both from the dramatic point of view and from the philosophical point of view. However, thinkers such as Apicella (2021), Mársico (2021) and Romanina (2020) assert that it is a consensus of the Platonic dialogue, as questions knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), even Gerena (2008) says that Plato has abandoned his explanation from ideas and questions the approaches he had made to the subject of knowledge in previous dialogues such as the Menon or in works such as the Republic.

Therefore, it is important to note that Socrates' explanation of maieutics is within the framework of the question of why knowledge is. It is this question that opens and closes, in a way, the explanation of Socratic Maieutics, and it is significant that it is precisely in this dialogue on knowledge where the art used by Socrates to bring forth the truth is explained, which is an interpretative lens that must be left behind when addressing the subject of Maieutics in Socrates.

Socrates describes his intellectual midwifery art in the following fragments of the Teeteto: from 148e to 151d (Plato, 1988), fragments which in turn will be divided into five parts as follows:

*i. 148e. Evidence that Teeteto is pregnant:* After Socrates encourages Teeteto to find a definition of what knowledge is, he says the following to him: "I assure you, Socrates, that many times I have tried to examine this question, hearing the news coming to me from your questions. [...] I have





not ceased to be interested in it” (Plato, 1988, p. 186). From the above, Socrates observes that Teeteto is suffering from labor pains because he wanted to find a definition of what knowledge is. The philosopher asserts that Teeteto has the fruits within him: “You suffer the pains of childbirth, Teeteto, because you are not sterile and you carry the fruit within you” (Plato, 1988, p. 186).

This fragment shows that the art of maieutics, according to the Greek philosopher, starts from the assumption that the interlocutor is pregnant, i.e., has *the possibility* of giving birth and knowing, a situation that is not common to all people, since not all are pregnant. In addition, the figure of pain and fertility cannot be neglected, i.e., giving birth to knowledge implies, on the one hand, the capacity for gestation and, on the other hand, suffering to discover the truth.

*ii. 149a. Revelation of Socratic art:* Socrates tells Teeteto that he possesses the same art as his mother’s, he claims that he is Fenareta’s son, who is a well-known midwife, claiming that he practices this same art, and that it is something that many do not know about him, which is why they point out that it is absurd and perplexing to men. He insists on asking Teeteto not to reveal to anyone that he possesses this art.

In this part of the dialogue Socrates confesses Teeteto his art of maieutics, comparing it with his mother’s, i.e., helping to give birth. The confession made by the philosopher that few know his art, whose ignorance is the cause of the astonishment he causes in many of his listeners, is not a minor detail. In addition, the request of not telling anyone, shows that not all interlocutors are prepared for this.

*iii. 149b-150a Characteristics of midwives:* Socrates describes the art of midwives by highlighting particular characteristics: they cannot be pregnant or be of childbearing age, they are not exercised by those who are infertile, “because human nature is too weak to acquire an art in matters of which it has no experience” (Plato, 1988, p. 188), they can give drugs to speed up labor or to make pain more bearable, they help give birth to those who have a bad birth or cause abortion when they consider it more adequate, and they are skilled matchmakers because they know which man and which woman can unite to have the security of fathering the best children.

The characteristics of midwives are conditions for any application of maieutics to teaching, i.e., in this case, the side of the one who holds the art of helping to give birth to the truth and avoid opinion or error. One of the aspects that cannot happen so quickly is *the experience* of the person who exercises this art: you must have suffered the pains of giving birth to knowledge to help others do the same.

*iv. 150b-151b. Socrates describes his art:* Start by making the following comparison:

My art of giving birth has the same characteristics as that of them [midwives], but it differs in the fact that it assists men and not women, and examines the souls of those who give birth, but not their bodies. Now, the greatest thing in my art is the ability it has to test by all means whether what begets the thought of the young is something imaginary and false or fecund and true (Plato, 1988, p. 189).

In addition, he also maintains that he is sterile in terms of wisdom, and that for this reason he is accused of questioning others and that he does not answer any of the questions put to him. So, he says, no one learns anything from him, but what they do is find in themselves the beautiful knowledge they have acquired. It also detects which soul is not pregnant and cordially suggests that another person orients it. In addition, those who give birth to ghosts and not real fruits, make them aware of it by discarding what they gave birth to, even though it costs them anger, as it happens to midwives with mothers. He does so, he asserts, “because I am not allowed in any way to grant as true what is false, nor to have the hidden truth” (Plato, 1988, p. 173).

This fragment is crucial in the text because Socrates emphasizes his analogy on the characteristics of midwives and their art, ensuring that the most relevant thing of maieutics is to contrast in various ways whether the knowledge of their interlocutors is true or not. This is goal of maieutics, i.e., to serve as a “curator” of the knowledge that is given birth, for which it is necessary to be faithful only to the truth, which can bring with it dislikes that must be willing to face.

*v. 151c-151d. Invitation to Teeteto:* Socrates urges Teeteto to surrender to him to help him give birth, which is why he has to strive to answer everything he asks him, and not be angry if the philosopher considers that any of his statements do not obey the truth, because it is his duty to do so as midwife of the truth, since he is not “allowed to be forgiving with the false or obscure the true” (Plato, 1988, p. 192). After explaining the midwife’s art and his art of giving birth, he returns to the topic by asking Teeteto about what knowledge is.

Once the explanations of what is maieutics are made, the Greek philosopher returns to the topic of dialogue on knowledge, for which his interlocutor can spare no effort in answering all that is asked, i.e., the art of Socrates is in dialogue, so that his Teeteto can give birth to the truth.

The analysis of Socratic thought regarding the art of maieutics and what is dialogic education today serves as a platform to put in critical dialogue what Socratic art can contribute to this dialogic discussion in current education, which will be discussed in the next section.



## Contributions of maieutics to Dialogic Education

Despite the criticism that the Socratic method receives as a possible source for dialogic education (Matusov, 2009), it is considered that, based on the description of maieutics as an art expressed in the Teeteto dialogue collected by Plato, there are reasons to consider some points for dialogic education. On the one hand, it is relevant the art of asking what is evident in maieutics as a contribution to education, especially in the current era so marked, on the one hand, by instrumentalism and the argument of authority, and, on the other hand, by the eclipse of which the question is object in a way by Heidegger (1962) when he asserted that the question about the being was fallen into oblivion.

On the other hand, maieutics is enlightening because it recalls the protagonist role of the student in the learning process, because with this method students realize their potential (Musliikh *et al.*, 2022). In this sense, the contributions of the Socratic Maeutics to dialogic education that are highlighted in this section are, first, the recovery of the art of asking questions, and second, the memory that it is the student who builds and travels his own learning path.

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### Maieutics retrieves the question and the art of elucidating.

One of Socrates' merits is his ability to ask questions so that his listener could mention what was inside him. But this was not just a linear question-and-answer view. Socrates sought that his question aroused uneasiness (perplexity and amazement) in his listener, i.e., that the question aroused elucidating. The Greek philosopher says to Teeteto: "Surrender to me, I am the son of a midwife, and know this art by myself, and make every effort to answer whatever I ask you" (Plato, 1988, p. 192). It is evident that one of the ways to give birth to the truth is through the question.

Therefore, a first contribution of Socratic maieutics to dialogic education is to recover the question for the student to ask. Asking leads immediately to wondering, awakening that natural desire to know of which the Stagirite spoke beginning his *Metaphysics* (Aristotle, 1994). But it must be clarified that to know necessarily requires a question of substance, since "the question is reflection in action. What is it that raises that reflection? It seems to be linked to desire or intention" (Marcel, 1957, p. 144). This statement made by the existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel shows how the fact of asking is the way to reflection. The formulation of a question from the Socratic point of view is intended to try to

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internalize a certain topic in order to reach the truth; however, Marcel also states that the fact of asking, of reflecting, is linked to the intention of knowing the subject, which, according to Aristotle, is natural.

Thus, it can be assured that the question is part of the very essence of man. Philosophy is the daughter of the question. The classics knew that it was much more important to formulate a question than to formulate the answers themselves, because, in a way, every question is anchored in itself as part of the answer. Obviously, man is the only being able to question himself. Now, questioning is not something spontaneous—as one might think when claiming that it is common to every human being—but is a *human reaction*; a rejection or opposition to the evident or the everyday. The question is always the daughter of human dissatisfaction. The argument is simple: if the person experienced that the immediate and the obvious fully satisfied his desire, the questions would not fit and would not be necessary.

Indeed, the question is opposing what is given to the eye. Man, as a being dissatisfied by nature, will always wonder, this is clearly stated by Ranher (1979) in the following terms:

The infinite horizon of the human question is experienced as a horizon that goes farther the answers man is able to give himself. Man may try to leave in peace the terrible infinity to which he is exposed by asking, out of anguish at the terrible and may abandon what he knows and is familiar with; but the infinity in which he is framed penetrates also his daily action. In principle, man is always on his way. [...] man experiences himself as the infinite possibility, he always questions again in theory and in praxis every achieved result, he always moves in a wider horizon that opens to him without limits (p. 51).

The depth of the formulation of a question can be clearly seen here, even, according to the Rangerian argument, it reveals man's desire for infinity, no matter how convincing an answer may be, it is never fully satisfied. Along the same lines as the German theologian, Heidegger (1962) argued, from philosophy, the following:

All asking is a searching. Every search has its previous address that comes from what you have been looking for. To ask is to seek to know "what is" and "how is" an entity. Seeking this knowledge can become an "investigation" or release and determine what you ask. The question has, as to "ask for..." its reason. All "ask for..." is somehow "ask..." When asking is inherent, in addition to what you ask, a thing to which you ask. [...] What is interesting about this [the question] is that the question "sees through" itself from the first moment in all directions of the aforementioned characters of the question itself (p. 14).



A simple glance is sufficient to corroborate that no person escapes the ability to question himself, which may be hidden, and, to this extent, man is—as can be inferred from the heideggerian statement—a being in a permanent state of *search*, because every question throws into the future to try to *find* “something” that is equivalent to the greatness of the question. This could be said of all sorts of questions. Therefore, it is obvious that many questions are immediately satiated as such. But it is alluded, in a more general and therefore more humane way, to the ability to ask oneself. This ability is in continuous relation with the existential sense itself.

Therefore, the teacher has the task not only to ask for the dialogue to flow with and between students, but also to encourage their students to ask and, consequently, undertake that dialogue with themselves, that dialogue which, according to Gadamer (1998), Plato called to think, and which also Feuerbach (1975) reinforced in the following terms: “Man thinks, i.e., talks, speaks to himself” (p. 51). This is in line with dialogic education that does not intend to teach what to think, but mainly challenges to think (Teo, 2019). Indeed, it is not that the student is a passive subject waiting for someone to give birth to him, but that he also begins to dialogue with himself. For this reason, the challenge of education, from the perspective of Maieutics, is not limited only to a transmission, but also to awakening an interest in the interlocutor to know from his own worldview.

In this sense, the socratic maieutics reminds dialogic education the importance, first, of asking questions, and, second, of generating the capacity to ask questions, which is a very complex challenge nowadays because the human being satisfies his main needs with immediate things, such as, for example, consumption (Cortina, 2002), to the point of adding one more entry to the paraphrase of the fortunate Cartesian expression, arguing that “I consume... then I exist” (Cortina and Carreras, 2003).

Therefore, according to the Socratic Maeutics in dialogic education it is necessary to generate disagreements in students (labor pains). It cannot be forgotten that those who relate to Socrates, the philosopher argues, “suffer labor pains and are full of perplexity at night and in the day” (Plato, 1988, p. 191). The Socratic ability to baffle his interlocutors is something that is common in his different dialogues, whose characteristics, as Teeteto says, is “astonishment” or “stunning” (Plato, 1988, p. 202). Consequently, students must be confronted with their own truths and opinions, because at that very moment when the person enters that internal conflict between the real and the possible, between what is and what could become, is when the question arises and emanates the reason that Camus (1973) referred to: “One day the “Why” arises? And it all starts in



this exhaustion tinged with wonder. ‘It begins,’ that is the important thing” (p. 132). It is precisely this beginning that leads to the discovery of truth, which is what will be discussed in the next section.

### *Maieutics remembers that the student builds his own learning path*

The role of Socrates was to mediate, so he boasted, on the one hand, that he knew nothing, but, on the other hand, that those who related to him discover great things:

So, I am not wise in any way, nor have I achieved any discovery that has been engendered by my own soul. However, those who deal with me, although some seem very ignorant at first, as soon as our relationship advances, all make admirable progress (Plato, 1988, p. 190).

This is related to the Platonic way of conceiving truth as de-concealment or de-veiling.

Heidegger (2007), in his commentary on the parable of the Cavern and the Teetetus, expressed that “something true is a *ἀληφές*, something not hidden” (p. 22). Likewise, according to the Greek language, one of the meanings of the word truth is *αλήθεια*. Etymologically, the prefix “a” nullifies the denial of the root, which comes from the verb “*lantano*”, which means to hide; therefore, at risks of reductionism of any translation (Vargas-González, 2022), the truth is de-concealment, i.e., the maieutics helps to remove the veil of what the interlocutor has hidden. Indeed, what Socrates does is not tell what the truth is but mediate, so that his interlocutor discovers for himself and with his own efforts what is true. Therefore, learning in this case is its own conquest, which comes from within, which is why it is a learning that leaves its mark.

In this respect, the socratic maieutics is enlightening for dialogic education, especially because one of the great challenges of education today is meaningful learning, i.e., learning that does not violate what the person is and knows. From the perspective of maieutics, it is proposed that it is the student, through dialogue, who builds his knowledge, reason for which it is a conquest, the result of his own effort, and therefore learning can have, in addition to content, meaning.

However, it is evident that nowadays many people, especially those who are in the process of learning in formal education, are limiting themselves to receiving information without questioning themselves, i.e., they are giving up the reflective dimension, accepting what others say as truth, and settling for the explanations of reality given by others, falling into a common grayish uniformity, what José Ingenieros (2008) called mediocrity.



Therefore, in this aspect, maieutics has the challenge of bringing to light the truth (Doerr-Zegers, 2022), since its role is not to inform or transmit, so marked in traditional education, but to help uncover (unhide) through the art of dialogue, i.e., the teacher is a mediator and not the one who transmits knowledge. In this case the protagonist is the student who discovers and builds by himself thanks to the dialogic interaction with himself, with the other (the other students and with his teacher) and with the other (the world).

In maieutics, truth is constructed through dialogue. The dialogue presupposes an *ethos* oriented towards the truth (Vigo, 2001) and towards the recognition of the other as a valid interlocutor (Vargas and Cortés, 2017). There is one commitment to the truth and to the other. It is important to note that human beings create realities in dialogue with others. But the dialogue is not only given with words spoken or written, which would be a very narrow vision of the *logos* that moves man, vision that is the result of that historical injustice that is made with the Stagirita when interpreting lightly the expression of the human being as a being endowed with *logos*. It cannot be forgotten that *logos* are manifested holistically in humans (Panikkar, 2003), even in silence, since, as Yourcarnar (2013) would say, “all silence is made of words that have not been said” (p. 31). The human being *is said* in everything. Not surprisingly, Heidegger (2000) asserted that “language is the house of being. Man dwells in his abode” (p. 11).

Therefore, a true dialogue is a challenge to the argument of authority because the teacher is not the one who possesses the truth but helps to discover it through the environment conducive to dialogue. Bakhtin (1984), commenting on the Socratic dialogue, asserts that “the truth is not born nor found within the head of an individual person, it is born between people who collectively seek the truth, in the process of their dialogical interaction” (p. 110).

Indeed, Socratic maieutics reaffirms the need to rethink the argument of authority, so marked in traditional education, and which, undeniably, has been a mechanism of power and alienation. According to Bakhtin’s interpretation (1981), the Socratic dialogue has a subversive view of authority. When education is based on the argument of authority, it easily becomes a meaningless education, and therefore leaves no imprint. In contrast, in maieutics the main actor is the student, who discovers by his own effort knowledge and therefore is an autonomous learning. One of the merits of maieutics is that it helps to give meaning to knowledge to the extent that the student is the one who creates and co-creates knowledge.





In this sense, one of the merits of maieutics compared to traditional education is that the student goes his own way and does not assume as true something because another says that it is true. As Nietzsche (2001) warned: “No one can build you the bridge by which you must walk on the current of life. No one except you” (p. 28). It is this autonomy deduced from the maieutics that makes the learning has meaning for the student and is his own conquest and not something that comes from outside. In maieutics, learning is autonomous and not heteronomous and that is why you can talk about meaningful learning. A passage from Plato (1986), criticizing the lyrics, gives an account of this, when he assures the following:

It is forgotten what they will produce in the souls of those who learn them, neglecting memory, since, noting what is written, they will reach memory from outside, through characters other than from within, from themselves and by themselves. So, it is not a memory drug you have found, it is a simple reminder. Appearance of wisdom is what you provide to your students, which is not true. Because having heard many things without learning them, it will seem that they have a lot of knowledge, being, on the contrary, in most cases, totally ignorant, and difficult, moreover, to try because they have ended up becoming apparent sages instead of real sages (pp. 403-404).

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## Conclusions

There is now greater consensus that the teaching process is not limited to the transmission of content and learning to receive it (Reznitskaya, 2012). Velasco and Alonso (2008) argue that the interaction between the student and the teacher in traditional education has not been equitable neither in terms of time, since the teacher has more privilege when expressing himself, nor in terms of quality, because the relationship is always asymmetric. For this reason, a paradigm shift is required not only theoretical and ontological, but also pragmatic, i.e., that it really takes place in educational practice and goes beyond scientific research, and it is here where Socratic maieutics can hold ground for dialogic education, since it was an art that helped many to build knowledge in its time, despite the criticisms.

In order to understand the contribution that maieutics makes to dialogic education and not fall into anachronistic injustices, it cannot be lost from the interpretative view that Socratic maieutics is circumscribed within the Platonic worldview, which has demarcated intentions and widely analyzed by research. One of them is the conception of truth, which according to González Arocha (2021) is quite complex in postmodernity,

due to the appeal to fragmentation and weakness in thought (Ramírez *et al.*, 2013). However, Alexander (2019), speaks of dialogic pedagogy in the world of post-truth, and Schutijser De Groot's (2022) exposes how to face post-truth from a neoaristotelian foundation of education.

On the other hand, based on Socratic philosophy, there is a call to recover the great human questions and not only the technical and instrumental questions so marked in traditional education. Education, in many scenarios, has been dedicated to transmitting and cultivating knowledge that, although valuable, is not enough for a human being crowded with existential searches that are not exhausted by the technical and scientific answers. Education seems to relegate in many contexts, as Frankl would say (2015), that man is in search of permanent meaning, and not only of knowledge. In fact, to take a specific example in the university field, a profession is a life choice that responds to a search far beyond some knowledge that will enable the world of work or science.

This may be due to the rule of instrumental rationality in education in the teaching and learning process that is increasingly orienting instruction and training to develop or strengthen competencies, which is leading to have technically very competent people, but with a great debt to *the sense* of what *they do* and what *they are*, relegating this search only to basic and middle education because it is not within the training plan.

All this can be countered by an adequate vision of dialogue in education, without ignoring today's dialogic crisis, argued, among others, by Gadamer (1998) and Ratzinger (1970). This implies that dialogue is not considered an instrument, since a question that must be overcome in dialogic education is to think of language as a tool, because all instruments become oppressors, and Freire (1970) remembered that one of the characteristics of dialogue is to be a transformative art, because "there is education where there is dialogue" (Vergara Henríquez, 2022, p. 171).

All these risks are, in a way, counteracted by the Socratic experience of *Maeutics* in dialogic education, as described in this research, because, on the one hand, it helps to recover the art of the question and the existential sense of asking, and, on the other hand, it collapses the verticality of the argument of authority in the spaces of learning, looking for more symmetrical and horizontal relationships that really generate significant knowledge capable not only of technically forming but also of throwing those existential questions that remind the student that he is an avid being of sense.

Obviously, with issues that are applications of techniques, for example, with professions that have a high instrumental component in their



*work* rather than in their *being*, the proposal of maieutics may have more limitations, because, for example, when what is required is to apply a rule or the guidelines of a regulation in a learning scenario, it is more challenging to carry it out. For this reason, teachers play a very important role in maieutics, with their willingness to listen, something quite forgotten, and which is essential for recognizing the other as a valid interlocutor. Therefore, in any scenario, even in the most technical, teachers must promote scenarios of dialogue, an issue that in many cases is not an easy task, because, in socratic terms, the soul unveils with language, and nudity always generates shame.

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