

TRAINING THE OPEN MIND: THE EMOTIONAL REGULATION OF DISSONANCE THROUGH THE USE OF SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

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RESEARCH CONTEXT

The present contribution, as an exploratory phase (Lumbelli, 1984) of a broader doctoral research, aims to investigate a strategy for teaching philosophy in high schools, inspired by Socratic Disputation (Flammia, 2021), which aims at the creation and effective management of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) as a tool for promoting critical thinking, which we will refer to here as "Socratic Dissonance." The research builds on a series of philosophical workshops in which the investigated teaching strategy was applied, held in the years 2016/2019 in an Italian professional technical institute, in which I participated as a teacher, involving about 150 students on a continuous basis (3 years).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



PHILOSOPHY TEACHING

The open issues regarding philosophy teaching (Caputo, 2019; Gaiani, 2014; Lipman & Sharp, 2017; Rombout et al., 2022).

DIALOGIC TEACHING

Dialogic teaching, with special focus on Socratic dialogue (Howe & Abedin, 2013; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Phillips, 2014; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2020; Sedova et al., 2014)

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

The concept of dissonance or cognitive conflict: its origins in psychological and pedagogical research, and the challenges related to its educational use (Butera & Darmon, 2010; Festinger, 1957; Lee & Kwon, 2001; Limón, 2001).

CRITICAL THINKING

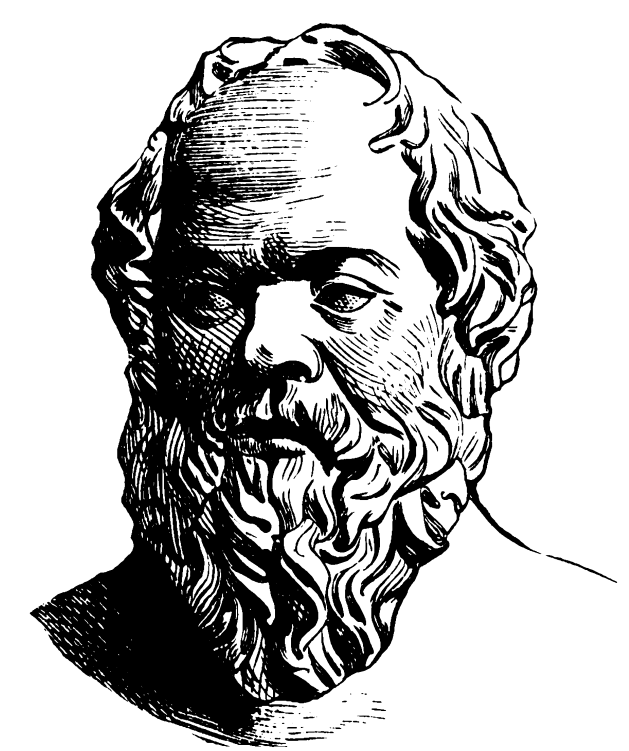
The debate about the concept of critical thinking, with particular reference to the relationship between critical skills and dispositions (Ennis, 1996; Facione, 2011; Facione et al., 1995).

DIDACTIC TRANSPOSITION

The issues related to didactic transposition (Chevallard, 1989, 1991; Nigris, 2015).

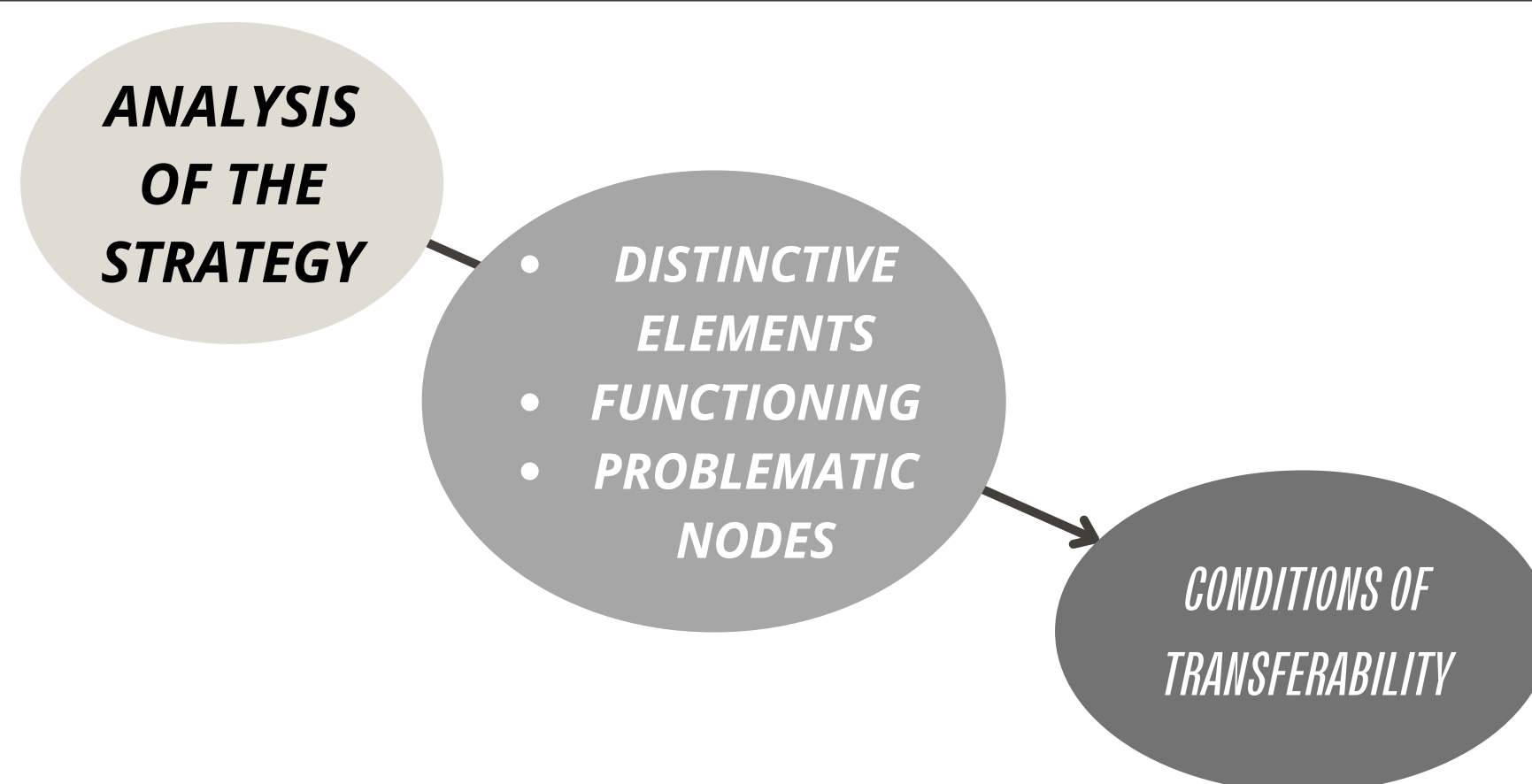
OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Open-mindedness, defined as the capacity to acknowledge evidence that challenges our beliefs and be willing to modify or abandon those beliefs if necessary (Hare, 2003; Kruglanski, 2013).



RESEARCH GOALS

The final goal is to provide an educational analysis of the strategy under investigation and to identify problematic issues related to its transferability

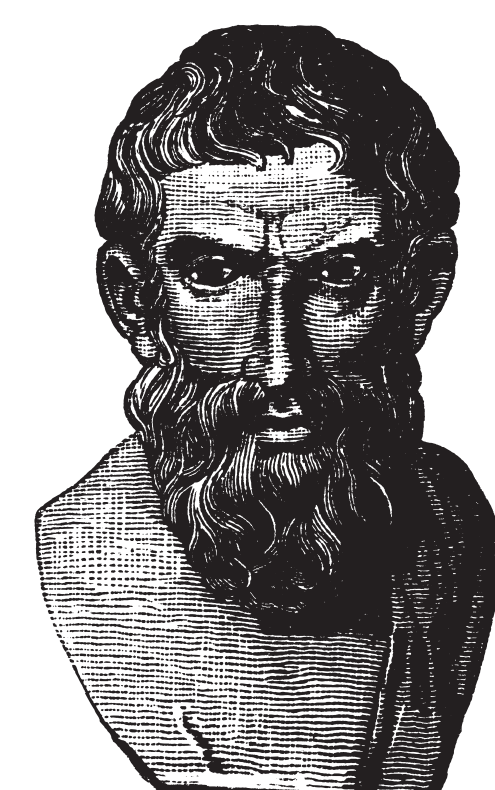


RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How Socratic brachylogy and the use of cognitive dissonance can function as a teaching strategy that can promote argumentative skills and critical thinking?
- Can such a strategy constitute a teaching methodology to be proposed?

METHODOLOGY

- **INSTRUMENT:** In-depth semi-structured interviews, the lineup of which included general questions about the course experience along with more specific questions investigating the following topics: motivations for participating in the workshops, representation of the discipline, confrontation, and conflict with peers and teacher. The outline and design were tested through two pilot interviews.
- **SAMPLING:** convenience sampling) + purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) = 18 students (2 for pilot interviews, excluded from final analysis).
- **DATA ANALYSIS:** The 16 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed using an inductive approach following the criteria of reflexive thematic analysis codified by Braun & Clarke (2006; 2019)



EARLY FINDINGS

- **The experience of dissonance:** the experience of dissonance is associated with emotional discomfort, but its educational value is widely recognized, so much so that it is referred to as "good discomfort": "it's good discomfort, it's interesting discomfort, it's more of a thought of maybe I'm doing something wrong, maybe it's not exactly the way I see it, and so that thing creates some discomfort, however... it stimulates you to see it from other points of view" STU11.
- **Confrontation with the teacher and peers:** the greater difficulty reported in handling disagreement with peers than with the teacher, who is constantly in the role of refuting the arguments presented, confirms the usefulness of an approach that privileges teacher-student interaction in the early stages of the process: "Between us who didn't know each other a little bit of fear, with the teacher everything is calm" STU14.
- **The regulation of emotions:** the ability to better manage one's emotions, particularly irritation during clashes of opinion, is recognized as one of the skills acquired through the course: "thanks to philosophy, I learned first of all not to get caught up in anger, because in any case, one has to respect other people's ideas anyway" STU05.
- **The selection of topics:** the topics chosen, related to students' personal experiences, played a key role in motivating attendance and participation: "topics that school generally does not do, they do not talk about because maybe they think students are not ready yet" STU02