

# HERMENEUTICAL-DIALOGIC ELEMENTS FOR AN ECO-RELATIONAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

## Elementos hermenéutico-dialógicos para una formación universitaria eco-relacional

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### Abstract

This article discusses/elaborates the hermeneutic-dialogic elements of an hermeneutic pedagogy applied to “university teaching”, for an eco-relational education since where there are relations, there are contradictions; where there are contradictions, there is context; where there is context, there is dialogue; where there is dialogue, there is education; where there is education, there is history to interpret; where there is history; there is learning and understanding. We approach to university teaching from the perspective of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics in order to assume dialogue as a source of permanent humanization, of overcoming of differences and approaching to truth. From this standpoint, we propose a dialogic-eco-relational model, which axis is language for an inter-humane understanding of humanizing education spawned by the intersection of theoretical elements coming from philosophical hermeneutics, critical pedagogies and the demands of university teaching as a community of meaning.

The objective of this article is oriented towards the deepening of knowledge and the construction of a theoretical proposal through the hermeneutic dialogue of understanding in order to know and improve the training practice for deep human understanding in the university environment. As a problem, a kind of “monologization” of the formative practice is assumed as an expression of the current neoliberal market education. To do this, we explore Gadamer’s hermeneutic coordinates to shape an eco-relational formation in the context of late modernity and its instrumental r(el)ationality. The phenomenological-hermeneutical method, in its integrating capacity, poses a unique harmony from the ontological and epistemological point of view, by constituting itself as an interpretive-ontological approach, which simultaneously assumes existing, being and being in the world expressed linguistically. We conclude that current and future university education is played out in the exchange between subjectivities and alterities where dialogue is the mediator between the concept and the educational experience, since the *ethos* of education is dialogue as, in turn, the *telos* of education is interhuman understanding.

**Suggested citation:** Vergara Henríquez, Fernando José (2022). Hermeneutical-dialogic elements for an eco-relational university education. *Sophia, colección de Filosofía de la Educación*, 33, pp. 163-189.

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### Keywords

Philosophy of education, pedagogy, hermeneutics, education, dialogue, university.

### Resumen

Este artículo desarrolla algunos elementos hermenéutico-dialógicos de la pedagogía hermenéutica aplicada a la “formación universitaria” para una educación eco-relacional, pues donde hay relaciones, hay contradicciones; donde hay contradicciones, hay contexto; donde hay contexto; hay diálogo; donde hay diálogo, hay educación; donde hay educación, hay historia que interpretar; donde hay historia, hay aprendizaje y comprensión. Nos aproximamos a la formación universitaria desde la hermenéutica filosófica gadameriana para asumir al diálogo como fuente permanente de humanización, de superación de diferencias y de aproximación a la verdad, desde el cual proponemos un modelo dialógico eco-relacional cuyo eje es el lenguaje para la comprensión interhumana de una educación humanizadora fruto del cruce entre los elementos teóricos provenientes la hermenéutica filosófica, de las pedagogías críticas y de los requerimientos de la formación universitaria como comunidad de sentido.

El objetivo de este artículo se orienta hacia la profundización en el conocimiento y construcción de una propuesta teórica mediante el diálogo hermenéutico de la comprensión con el fin de conocer y mejorar la práctica formativa para la comprensión humana profunda en el ámbito universitario. Como problema se asume una suerte de “monologización” de la praxis formativa como expresión propia de la educación de mercado neoliberal actual. Para ello, exploramos las coordenadas hermenéuticas de Gadamer para darle forma a una formación eco-relacional en el contexto de la tardía y su r(el)acionalidad instrumental. El método fenomenológico-hermenéutico en su capacidad integradora, plantea una singular sintonía desde el punto de vista ontológico y epistemológico, al constituirse como un enfoque interpretativo-ontológico, que asume simultáneamente el existir, el ser y el estar en mundo expresados lingüísticamente. Concluimos que la formación universitaria actual y futura se juega en el intercambio entre subjetividades y alteridades donde el diálogo es el mediador entre el concepto y la experiencia educativa, pues el *ethos* de la educación es el diálogo como, a su vez, el *telos* de la educación es la comprensión interhumana.

### Palabras clave

Filosofía de la educación, pedagogía, hermenéutica, educación, diálogo, universidad.

## Introduction

This article elaborates the constitutive elements of the proposal of a philosophical hermeneutics of education as a philosophical hermeneutics of eco-relational formation based on what Gadamer determines as the “hermeneutic situation”, which consists in the centrality of the relationship in the hermeneutic praxis of understanding equivalent to the educational praxis of formation. Therefore, this philosophical hermeneutics of eco-relational training is based on the centrality acquired by the relationship understood as r(el)ationality, i.e., the pedagogical relationship of meaning based on the capacity of questioning (question and answer) for configuring an interpretative tradition and since understanding is intrinsically dialogical, there is no understanding without dialogue, and there is no education without both.

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The aim is to establish a hermeneutic theory of understanding from the hermeneutic coordinates of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The problem detected and to which we react is the excessive “monologization” of current education in the face of the forcefulness control of competition for the market. Competition has muted the dialogical capacity of education, undermining the critical capacity in the horizon of interhuman understanding of the place and destiny of the subject in the world. The overlapping between the capacity for dialogue, the will to interpret and the comprehensive experience indicate the hermeneutic faculty of education in the face of a technocognitive, technocompetitive neoliberal education which, being fundamentally anti-dialogical, slows down the flow of exchange of interpretations for an understanding that assures that which complex societies have substituted by technology: the spatio-temporal presentiality for the survival of the human, even more, humanity itself for the projection of the human.

We maintain that education is played in the exchange between subjectivities and otherness where dialogue is the mediator between the concept and the educational experience; dialogue is the sign of the educational experience. That which takes place in the dialogic interaction between the world, the subject and the word is what constitutes the relational ground of humanity and, therefore, the sign of university education.

The theoretical framework proposed refers to contemporary philosophical hermeneutics and its projection in the educational world, specifically in higher education or university training, which necessarily establishes the need to develop cognitive skills and relational competencies consistent with this form of interpretation, i.e., critical discursivity and relational dialogicality. We will follow the following methodological criterion that converges critical theory, education, and hermeneutics: the understanding and interpretation of a text, considering as text any human situation content that has a symbolic content (didactic language, culture of the institution, interpersonal relationships in the university context, documents produced in the institution, etc.....). What is pursued is the unveiling of meaning as a hermeneutic category of a subject in formation, since the meaning that nourishes a definition of education, according to García Amilburu and García Gutiérrez (2012) attending both its etymology and its scopes and modulations as a sociocultural phenomenon or in direct confrontation to the processes of indoctrination, conditioning and training (pp. 47-64) is that solidary process in which each one always accepts the other in a horizon of possible mutual understanding for its humanization and transformation. To this end, it is important

to answer some of the following questions: What would be the role of dialogue? Is education the place of dialogue, i.e., does it place a word that, in dialogue, transcends the appropriation of knowledge to be led towards the formation in the understanding horizon of the other, since dialogue develops between the subject and his significant other in a bidirectional communication, constituting itself as a dialogic onto-linguisticity constitutive of pedagogical relations?; What is the main role of pedagogy if we consider understanding as the main activity of the human being? Where are the relations, approximations, distances and limits between pedagogy and hermeneutics established? Is it possible to establish a hermeneutic-pedagogical model for university education of general character and integral horizon? Is it possible to consider that the main problem of education is to attend to the question of meaning, since every educational process involves an interpretation and entails an understanding?

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Hermeneutics is a philosophical paradigm that provides the basis for interpreting the linguistic experience underlying *pedagogical praxis*. Therefore, the theoretical path followed, draws coordinates for the orientation of educational relations whose north is the de-instrumentalizing intercomprehension of dialogic formation understood as a relational and socio-temporal event between the subject and the world that (trans)form that has three main meanings: (a) it is that which is interpreted, not being comprehensible, pretends to pass itself off as a meaning that relays a sense; (b) it refers to that which is possibly interpretable or comprehensible, but has not yet been experienced; and (c) it mentions the idea, judgment or theory that is supposed to be understood, although it has not been interpreted or experienced, and from which the relational dialogue takes place. We consider as a reflective basis and methodological orientation that education should not be considered or defined as a fact or a thing, nor as an interpretation or an objectification, nor as a result or doctrinal or ideological clarification, but as a vivifying humanizing dialogue where hermeneutics acquires a primary role at the time of the solidary compressive construction of knowledge. The concreteness of the problem of a relationship between hermeneutics and pedagogy is played in the proposal for a hermeneutic-dialogical pedagogy of understanding that broadens and deepens the learning processes, situated and besieged by the instrumental evaluative processes that give way to reasoned practices of formative action endowed with meaning, an action that unfolds in labile contexts in constant mutation and evolution, which demands that interpretation be a lasting basis for a comprehensive experience as

dialogical subjects of the educational process and not monological objects of the competitive process.

The issue here is the sense of the hermeneutics of eco-relational dialogue, or, in other words, what happens in modern rationality when it tries to adjust its intradiscursive monologic character of an asymmetrical individuated subject with the interdiscursive dialogic character of a symmetrical communitarian other.

The methodological perspective is phenomenological-hermeneutic, which implies both an intellectual and attitudinal orientation rooted in the study of the essential meaning of phenomena, as well as in the sense and importance they have when thinking the fundamental categories of tradition. Phenomenology is the experiential study of reality and of the phenomenon in its essential radicality, its own nature and as it presents itself to the consciousness; it is applied in the description and analysis of the contents of the consciousness, seeking to delve into its realities that, temporally contextualized, the researcher must find; furthermore, it is methodologically constituted in an experiential study of the personal interiority of the subject, perceived in interaction with reality. For its part, hermeneutics, as an art or technique of interpretation, fulfills the role of mediator between the subject and the object of study, interpreting the phenomena from its own context of action, from its particular historical time in order to unveil, give meaning and perspectives. In this sense, hermeneutics would suppose the clarification of the true “intention” and of the “interest” that underlies all “understanding” of reality, and with this, it would be presented as the art of correctly understanding the word of the other. The phenomenological-hermeneutic method, in its integrating capacity, is harmonic from the ontological and epistemological point of view, as it is constituted as an interpretative-ontological approach, which simultaneously assumes the existing, and being in the world expressed linguistically (Vergara, 2008a, 2008b).

This article presents the context of what we have called modern r(el)ationality as a sociocultural scenario determining a closed subjectivity impossible for dialogue as the basis of a humanizing education; to understand this sociocultural and epochal *ethos* for contemporary education, we present the hermeneutic elements for an eco-relational formation from Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy: language, tradition, understanding and formation constitute its theoretical basis for the proposal of a dialogical rationality that aims at interhuman understanding as the most proper sign of an eco-relational formation.

## Modern r(el)ationality

In the human cultural process, the history of philosophical thought reflects both the scientific thought and the beginning of perpetual questioning, which makes of existence a passionate work of critical reflection on the aspirational and regulatory character of knowledge; on the shaping of individual and collective meaning together with the ethical-political commitment to the other; and especially, on the meaningful formulations of thought and action for the understanding of our existence in the world, in short, on the totality of reality. We cannot avoid the fact that today the disinterested contemplation of ideas, the systemic theorization of reality, the modeling of thinking, techno-science now understood as cosmotechnical, as well as doctrines with their political operability for social change have not been able to avoid the discredit of enlightened utopias and moral-ethical discourses to transform reality in terms of social justice and, thus, to prevent the divorce between the instructive reason of values and the instrumental reason of goods within modern subjectivity. Proof of the above is what the dichotomous design of the modern rational matrix has been able to achieve, firstly, as a substantive or normative condition of political-moral self-determination and totalizing faculty of theoretical functionality to understand nature, order, legality and the meaning of the world and, secondly, as an instrumental or regulatory condition as a historical differentiation process of social spheres with procedures oriented to rational-formal action that pursues the calculation and control of social and natural processes. As mentioned before (Vergara, 2014), these operations are embodied in the project of progressive modernity whose axis is the “dogmatic articulation of the rational destiny of the particular, social and historical life whose direction is not founded provisionally -insisting on the immediacy of events-, but programmatically -insisting on the planning of facts-” (p. 281), as an organ of social production of immanent sense replacing the organ of communitarian creation of transcendent sense, opening the great danger for theory: its disaffection with respect to nature and the theoretical instrumentalization for the control of the regular variables of the real.

The theoretical place and existential habitat are placed within the late version of modernity and the hegemony of an onto-techno-globalized rationality that has meant a resemantization of the categories of thought, beliefs and knowledge; a revalorization of ethical-political guidelines of coexistence and moral norms; a cosmovisional resymbolization in the construction of meaning; a withdrawal from the substantial to the instrumental of speech and language; an epistemic explosion and



instrumental dehumanization of the paradigms of thought; a re-reading of the traditional cultural wefts in the face of the new emerging discursive orders; a resignification of politics in the face of the radicalization of fundamentalist ideologies along with the entry of capitalism as a new religion; and an urgent discourse for ecological rescue in the face of systems constituted for human servitude and exploitation and environmental and animal overexploitation.

Reason is relational in its root, modulation, and exercise. This means that, as animals of meaning, we are rooted in reality in and from a relational feeling articulated by reason as a function of an individual goal inscribed in a collective destiny. This sort of recognition and otherness has been disarticulated in late modernity, due to a progressive privatization of human existence from the equally progressive weakening of the conditions that make it be recognized as other. The problem we pose is that of the dissociation that occurs between relationality (feeling) and rationality (reason) in late modernity as its own space for reflection, since both acquire a dysfunctional form, resulting in a paradoxical disarticulated relation between the two, affecting both the autonomy of the subject and its capacity to install in a common world, incorporate in a tradition and relate with history.

We observe that the connection between techno-utilitarian rationality with the subjectivation of life of a utilitarian-contractual nature will take place under the sign of economic value and of a blind relation only open to means; this value will be the reason of a privatized existence whose supreme end will be well-being, understood -according to the terms of mercantile transaction- as satisfaction in consumption. This privatization has the character of a vital experience as the property of a self-referential and radically relational subject for whom the other is a distant reality external to him without the possibility of communication from the common. In such exteriority, both manifest as living corporeal objects inaccessible to the community. It is the conformation of what we could call a non-subjectivity as an expression of a painless moral neo-individualism.

This has led to a sort of radicalization of the contradictory character of the rational modulation of modernity, namely, the discordance between the ethical-political norm and the technical-functional control, which has created sociocultural gaps with consequences and scopes observed daily, such as the secondary role of the subject in social change, the reduction of cultural spheres under the unequal sign of globalization as a totalizing character of the political-economic, the weariness before

the warning of the defunding of meaning by a nihilistic corruption of the conscience, the weakening of the value contours, as well as a deep disbelief in the transforming capacity of the techno-scientific reason to cure the own diseases generated by the totalitarian program of modernity that betrays reason and its purpose of human fulfillment, and to turn the subject into a means for instrumental manipulation for the alienation of nature and alienating reification of the ends.

Modern reason, as we have said (Vergara, 2020), is not interesting by the conceptual clarity that bases its philosophical-political program, but by the material results and transformations that instrumental reason is capable of achieving, i.e., the unfulfilled material promise is better than the longed-for immaterial promise - an insurable immanentism is preferable to a reliable transcendentalism - since instrumental rationality does not lead to universal freedom, but to the administrative-bureaucratic control that encloses the subjects in a swarm of social circuits of computerized systems, disconnecting the forms of life from those cultural spheres that edify meaning and value, i.e., from the coordinates of a humanizing education.

From the above, it must be said that the possibility of a new mode of r(el)ationality will necessarily depend on a life-giving dialogical experience that recovers the value of historical intersubjectivity as a constituent cultural order of knowledge for the human community, and will be presented as an expanded background of consciousness, reflection, interpretation and understanding of the mundane and the transcendental for a global solidarity consciousness, because the crisis is expressed in the ethical-cultural contradictions that lie at the core of the market society and its place in nature, and it will indicate the paths that will lead our relationships towards an eco-r(el)ational re-enchantment, i.e., a relational-reason and a rational-relationship that will sustain the anthropological condition of our existence in harmony with nature, from a fulfilling existence, not for the advent of a new humanity, but for the arrival of the awaited humanity.

## Hermeneutical elements for eco-relational training

We believe that the main problem of education is to attend the question of meaning, since every educational process involves an interpretation and comprehension. Education is played in the showing and withdrawal of the educator, so that the meaning emerges before the existence of the



learner. Dialogue shows the way to the meaning of existence that emerges linguistically in the experience of the other, in a *dialogic hospitality* of understanding as educational *praxis* and hermeneutic experience. A university hermeneutic formation will allow interpreting the languages with which the formation has been defined, knowing that “there is no progress without past nor tradition without future” (Maceiras & Treballe, 1990, p. 15), since knowledge, culture and the theoretical framework where human formation lies are constructs whose meaning is given by the historicity of the concepts as well as in the very being of the subject as stated by Bárcena and Mèlich (2014):

As interpretative beings looking for meaning and understanding, the human being is a hermeneutic being [...], a “mediator”, a being who must pass through intermediate spaces, textual spaces in which he keeps his secrets. He must therefore learn the art of deciphering indirect meanings, the very art of hermeneutics (p. 108).

Where are the relations, approximations, distances and limits between pedagogy and hermeneutics established? In the overlap between interpretation and understanding with language and the world, i.e., in the structuring and encompassing relationship of history to which we incorporate meaning as a basic movement of human existence. This same intersection is applicable to education, at the moment in which it is defined as a consensual interpretation and understanding in the formative interaction between educability and learning. Education, understood as a dialectical process of socialization (socio-cultural tradition) and formative autonomization (self-training, formation and critical transformation), is a place of dialogue, since it places a word that goes beyond the appropriation of knowledge to be led towards the formation in the comprehensive horizon of the other, since dialogue develops in a bidirectional communication, forming a dialogic ontolinguistic constitutive of pedagogical relations.

First, we consider that hermeneutics and education are conceptually related in practicality, i.e., the ultimate goal of education is inherently a sort of exercise of human solidarity, which contributes to integral human development, as Wierciński (2010) argues:

The real goal of education is not to support false confidence in one’s intellectual treasures toward self-reliance and optimally orchestrated independence, which contributes greatly to the social perception of a well-educated person as proud and arrogant. It is rather to help discover what it means to be a human being and how to live a good life (p. 31).



The main axis of hermeneutic understanding and its experience is language as an element of historical mediation and existence of universal and ontological character to access the world and reality or more, that there is world, we are and we are in reality, because only the being that can be understood is language the understanding of what is, although the linguistic experience of meaning of the world is always inapprehensible at all. Understanding is only reached with a historical community where language and dialogue are socio-cultural constants in the development of humanity.

The conceptual constellation of Gadamerian hermeneutics has the following statements: first, there can be no understanding that has not been oriented by a prior understanding, i.e., by the initial presence of a pre-understanding or, in other words, by prejudices as anticipation of the meaning of understanding or prior interpretation for an understanding. Interpretation is language that mediates between the subject and the object interrelated in the dialogue that takes place in history so that truth is an event that is said, written, and rewritten for interhuman understanding. Understanding is a collective experience recorded and accumulated during the activation of interpretation and the need for meaning of the historical existence of the subject. Gadamer (2004, 2005) gives importance to the prejudices of meaning in the constitution of the being, since prejudices are a clear anticipation of the opening to the world and constitute the previous orientation of all our experience and pre-conditions for understanding. Prejudices are not only part of the subjective installation in the world, but are also in the tradition to which we historically belong. Secondly, the circular structure of understanding or structure of the Heideggerian being-in-the-world, i.e., understanding is the circular relationship, interrelation and interpenetration that occurs between tradition and the subject inserted in a community that unites and roots him in a tradition in an endless and uninterrupted process of formation and transformation. This dynamic character of the world in a process of constant transformation means the expressions of history and historical-effectual consciousness, it is the effectuality of history on the consciousness of the subject. For Gadamer (2005) our consciousness is defined by an effectual history or by a historical event between the past and the present. In its insertion in the historical happening, the consciousness receives the action that is exerted upon it, since it is formed and shaped by this effectuation of history: it is a consciousness that is exposed to the effects of history. Thirdly, understanding is to understand oneself and to understand another; it takes place in and from a situation and from the horizon that defines it; for this reason, understanding acquires the fusional figure of horizons or perspectives.



Gadamerian hermeneutic philosophy is part of a tradition that considers education as a process of one's own will of autonomous character with representatives such as Rousseau (2011), Kant (2013), Nietzsche (2009), Simmel (2008), Freud (2011), Adorno (1998), Gadamer (2000) in which the teacher fulfills a collaborative function of stimulating, empowering, inciting, provoking, mediating the student's own will that is formed, self-formed and transformed in an enabling and edifying dialogue of humanity.

Hermeneutic pedagogy pursues the unique, individual, and social aspects of existence, both in its external expressions and in the internal lived experiences. Inasmuch as each person, from different and new horizons, understands new meanings in an infinite process of interpretations, as Gadamer (2000) argues "education is to educate oneself and formation is to form oneself" (p. 11). According to the hermeneutic tradition, as García Amilburu (2012) states:

The understanding of meaning is carried out in three phases: intellection, explanation, and application. These are fully complied in any educational experience because something is learned when its meaning is grasped and not when information is passively received. Things acquire meaning when they become one's own and the subject is in a position to apply them (p. 106).

Gadamer (2004, 2005) conceives language as that field of existential experience for the human being and this fundamental conception of his philosophical hermeneutics has made possible a radicalization of the philosophical problematic of understanding where language belongs to the ontological, anthropological, epistemological and political spheres of the existentialist and universalist subject, since it not only places us in a world, but also confers meaning and that meaning acquires meaning when it is shared communally in history. For Ortiz Osés (1973), "language is the structure where the ebb and flow of temporality crystallize, and it is the only one that configures the extemporaneous figure of man" (p. 23). We consider that Gadamer has carried out a radicalization of the philosophical problematic of understanding where language belongs to the ontological, anthropological, epistemological and political spheres of the existentialist and universalist subject, since it not only places us in a world, but also confers meaning and that meaning acquires meaning when it is shared communally in history.

In order to overcome behaviorism and positivism in the philosophy of education, the hermeneutic horizon of education places the ques-

tion of the purpose of education and the reformulation of objectives in the dialogical understanding of the experience of historical finitude for interhuman formation. Hermeneutics, applied to pedagogy, seeks to understand the educational process in its historical-cultural context. Hermeneutics does not seek to describe or explain educational phenomena, but rather to interpret and understand them as they occur in history from a dialogical horizon. And despite falling into the temptation that hermeneutics in relation to education can only be considered as a pedagogical theory because its statements are transitory and incapable of transcending history, it could be said that the theoretical legitimization of Gadamerian hermeneutics of a universal ontolinguisticity of the historical situation of the subject, enables hermeneutic pedagogy within the hermeneutic constellation of the philosophy of education sustained by conceptual bases to overcome the consideration of consensus, result of good will or imposed by dogmatism.

Given its temporal character, education takes place and acquires meaning both in its definition as mediator and in the horizontal fusion of perspectives that it opens to the comprehensive articulation of meaning in the dialogue of universal ontolinguisticity with the infinitude of the temporal tradition in a hermeneutic task of understanding in which language is not exhausted in the subjective conscience of the interpreter and even less in the dialogical construction of the common world where, as Duque (2002) says, “to understand is to be part in a movement that comes from afar, imprinting such mutations on it that make it recognizable as a pleiad of sendings” (p. 109). As opposed to science and metaphysics that yearn for the perennial and the universal, for what remains invariant, regular and objective, a pedagogy inscribed in the hermeneutic tradition would value, as Mèlich (2008) states, finitude, historicity, time and space, contingency and chance, the singular, the situation and the detail (p. 121).

Following Pagès (2020) we can think of “hermeneutics as Philosophy of Education [...] recovering three fundamental topics for Pedagogy: a) historicity, understood as the impact of history on our biographies; b) tradition, in its dimension of pre-judgment to which we must position ourselves, but which we cannot get rid of; c) understanding as a modality of dialogue in language. From the point of view of philosophical hermeneutics, we can affirm that education, by transmitting values, cultural heritage, languages and ideas, “undertakes a double purpose: on the one hand, to lead the learner to the place of inherited knowledge through instruction; on the other hand, to inspire a symbolically productive questioning of inherited knowledge, opening new meanings, allow-



ing other readings and broadening the perspective of meaning” (p. 101) in an opening towards the other.

Although it is impossible to reduce hermeneutics to a pedagogical method due to a conceptual contradiction, it is possible to establish it as an educational mediation with a practical purpose; it is even possible to establish it as a formative mediation with a humanizing purpose. The dialogical experience of hermeneutics takes place between the recognition of the nature of knowledge and the incompleteness of human understanding. Far from pedagogical normativity and close to educational relationality. “Thus, hermeneutics cannot be reduced to a simple pedagogical method: “hermeneutic pedagogy” includes hermeneutics as a teleological horizon, at the level of the educational purposes that give meaning to the practice itself. However, it is not possible to speak of a pedagogical hermeneutics, because hermeneutics cannot be transformed, under any circumstances (at the risk of becoming a mere instrument) into a norm or a prescription. Thus, when the Manifesto [*Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy*] proposes “to move from a hermeneutic pedagogy to a pedagogical hermeneutics” it poses a *contradictio in terminis*. If we define pedagogy as a normative science of education, whose objective is to prescribe the way in which the act of educating should be organized and carried out in the sense of the duty to be, it is impossible to propose hermeneutics as a pedagogy, because what precisely characterizes it as a philosophy of education is its irreducible condition to any prescription or norm that directs an action. According to Pagès (2020), the ontological aspect of Gadamer’s hermeneutics proposes precisely “to reverse the idea of hermeneutics as a mere method, despite the richness and complexity of its known applications in the field of religion, law and music or literature” (pp. 101-102).

In view of this, it is worth asking what is the contribution of a relational hermeneutic pedagogy of understanding for university education? What is the basis of the proposal for a hermeneutic-dialogical pedagogy of understanding? In the deep structural coincidence in the concept of “mediation”, which defines it for hermeneutics and concretizes it for education, in that it expands or complements the processes of situated learning (besieged by instrumental evaluative processes) to give way to the reasoned practices of formative action endowed with meaning, action that unfolds in labile contexts in constant mutation and evolution, which demands that only interpretation will be the lasting basis for a comprehensive experience as subjects of the educational process, since every educational process has an eminently social character, a sort of socio-educational *ethos* for mutual development.

In hermeneutic pedagogy, self-formation, formation and transformation constitute an event that the subject assumes through the processes of self-interpretation and interpretation always open to the understanding of the experience of the world, in which education is the most profound and determining humanizing experience in the existence of the subject and in the determination of the human world, since the person has to transform his natural condition of anthropological and existential incompleteness into prolongation opportunities of his life, transformation, existence and historical projection. The subject involved in education acts on himself, on the other, on the world and on the multiple relationships derived from it.

In these areas, training as self-cultivation, self-training, self-education constitutes the hermeneutic framework to insert the proposal of a hermeneutic pedagogy for the dialogical transformation of educational *praxis*, since, as Mendoza (2008) states:

Hermeneutics, assumed more as a philosophy than as a simple methodological or technical tool, has profound implications in the field of education, not only as a possibility of interpretation of the pedagogical phenomenon [...], but also as the very mission of the formation of the human being....], so that one could speak of a “hermeneutic pedagogy” aimed at developing in the learner forms of understanding of the world thanks to the dialogical interaction between theory and practice, texts and contexts, being and becoming, the individual and society, without the illusion of definitive certainty, not the easy accommodation to a technique or to a knowledge that is given and accepted as certain; but by virtue of an attitude of permanent questioning of reality, which allows the being in formation to confront the facts and the points of view on the facts with alternative perspectives and from broader horizons that seek to overcome the first perceptions [...]. And it is precisely in view of the complexity implicit in the mission of educating man that the complexity and uncertainty of the educational phenomenon is also recognized, which explains the collapse of the classical approaches of modernity to assume the analysis of this reality (p. 121).

If the theoretical horizon of pedagogy is to transform the information obtained from reality based on sensitivity, rationality and relationality and convert it into knowledge, and transform this knowledge into education, we are facing the humanizing activity that places the subject not only in reality, but humanly among subjects in a subjectivized interaction of identities. From this, the practical horizon of pedagogy emerges, and it becomes a simultaneous theoretical-practical activity where the



subject is also the object of educational action. It is in this imbrication or co-implication that the place for hermeneutic pedagogy as philosophy applied to education is drawn. Then, the ultimate goal of education is to develop together in life through the understanding of others.

The hermeneutic process tries to recognize the events of the educational *praxis* of the subjects co-involved in it, who dialogue about existence, share knowledge and trace meanings. We are not only what we remember, but we are what we say in a constant dialogue with oneself externalized by the language that brings us back in the encounter with the other, withdraws and replenishes us, externalizes us, liberates, and exposes us in the limit that marks the dialogue between language and the world, Bárcena and Mèlich (2014) expose it as follows:

Our societies seek this progress by promoting a technological culture for which technology is a totalizing system. A society in which “educating” constitutes a task of “manufacturing” the other in order to make him “competent” for the function to which he is socially destined, instead of understanding it as a hospitable reception of newcomers, i.e., an ethical practice interested in the formation of subjects (p. 22).

Hermeneutic pedagogy -which we will continue to call hermeneutic university training for an eco-relational education- seeks to interpret both the latencies and pathologies of meaning by emancipating the soul or interior of the subject in a dialogical exercise that attempts to bring out its potentialities, raising awareness of the unconscious and symbolically projecting values in a liberating axiology, because hermeneutics - as a paradigm of study on educational development that provides the basis for interpreting the theories and practices that underlie every educational process as a sociocultural event and understanding the interhuman formative event - is understanding the other that amplifies and overflows the subject to insert him in a complicity when he recognizes the other for a profound transformation of himself to become what he is, i.e., to be and become human among humans.

As stated by Moreu and Prats (2010), hermeneutics constantly reminds us that “education, as a human aspect, is a thinking and rethinking, a reading and rereading, a multiple and constant interpretation” (p. 86). For its part, hermeneutic pedagogy will revolve around the interpretation of education as mediation deeply linked to hermeneutics as educational interaction, oriented towards the interpretation and understanding of the world, as Mendoza (2008) says, where the practical dimension of education is inscribed, influencing the course of educational action

(p. 127). To interpret education from this hermeneutic perspective means to penetrate into the hidden folds of its pedagogical practices, since hermeneutics affects human learning in the theoretical-practical perspective. The place of realization of dialogical hermeneutics is education, since it is in its formative exercise that the humanization process reaches its internal coherence, contextual consistency, and common consensus in dialogue as a foundational experience of relationality.

## Dialogue as an essential condition for eco-relational education

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Following Gadamerian statements about the relationship and importance of education and the contributions of hermeneutic philosophy, we consider hermeneutics as a methodology to understand the educational phenomenon, its *praxis* and its scope, since it assumes the historical and socio-cultural conditions that configure the narrative, the temper and the rationality of the people involved in the educational *praxis* and in every learning process. In other words, it is only possible to understand the complex and plurisignificant educational process from the interpretative radicality of the personal experience inscribed in a historical community of perspectives, i.e., from a reasoned and reasoning dialogue for interhuman understanding.

We assume the dialogue with an investigative methodological foundation in order to approach and review university education as a permanent source of humanization, overcoming differences and approaching the truth, from which we propose some concepts for the possibility of an “eco-relational education”. By eco-relational education we mean the crossing of theoretical elements coming from philosophical hermeneutics, critical pedagogies and the requirements of university education as a community of meaning. Formation implies a correct understanding of reality, which is achieved through the dialogue with the other, with things, with the history of humanity. This exchange takes place in tradition, which is the great continuous conversation among human beings, in which we insert ourselves communally.

The relevance of establishing a dialogic hermeneutic model within the eco-relational university training lies in the encounter between the nature of the university as a critical consciousness of culture and the humanizing *praxis* of training in the sense of providing an updated look at the founding relationship of the dialogue between technique and art,

now between competence and relationship. On the other hand, it is the encounter between human nature and the vital nature of the real, as Paz (2003) says “we are made of words” (p. 30) where, for Ricoeur (2015) “the man who speaks gives meaning; in his verbal way of acting” (p. 253). Thus, the world exists in the linguistic forms that we establish to define the human and enables the union of the mind with culture (Bartra, 2014, p. 41), because according to Gadamer (2004) “language only exists in conversation” to relieve that “the capacity for dialogue is a natural attribute of the human being” (p. 203).

Therefore, what is the attitude that promotes dialogue? Do anthropological incompleteness and contradiction promote the gestures that initiate dialogue? It is the life-giving dialogue that takes place in the contextualized narration of history, without forced or fictitious counterpositions between the arguments of our discourses and the expectations of recognition. Therefore, the rationality applied in dialogue is fundamental, because in order not to fall into relativism or authoritarianism or excessive hermeneutism, it is necessary a reflexivity within the construction of meaning of cultural contexts, i.e., it demands the inter-logic articulation of life, which opens to other logics, as Picotti (1996) states, to the “historical construction of the human logos as inter-*logos*” (p. 298) now implying the multiplicity of rationalities and differences of relations.

Dialogue is the great forger of worlds, since it unfolds possible horizons in the construction of meaning for interhuman understanding and its purpose is understanding through the fusion of perspectives of interpretation, as Gadamer (2004) states “when two people meet and exchange impressions, there are two worlds in a certain sense, two world-views and two world builders that confront each other” (p. 205). In this sense, dialogue is a social praxis of understanding where, for Gadamer (2005) “language is the medium in which the interlocutors’ agreement and consensus about the thing take place” (p. 462).

Eco-relational education focuses on the linguistic-dialogical phenomenon in the horizon of inter-human co-understanding in experiential programs of dialogical learning for the community construction of meaning, since learning is the result of the relationships involved in the environment, history, social practices, cultural narratives, scientific interpretations, etc., as education would be defined from the dialogical implication for inter-human understanding. In this way, eco-relational education is a network of interpretations, so that the practical field of educational intervention is the historicity of personal projects, their unveiling and narrative construction.



There is a substantial tradition of dialogue first described by Socrates. In more modern times, several dialogists have argued for the power and value of dialogue as both an equitable and emancipatory form of communication such as Buber (1969), Gadamer (2005), Gergen (2015); Hirschkop and Shepherd (2001), Isaacs (2008), Poulakos (1974), Wierciński (2010) where to educate is to cultivate a special sensitivity towards the exercise of freedom and of a deep willingness to learn about oneself and, with this, to learn from the other and what r(el)ational humanity is all about. For their part, Latin American authors such as Freire (1970), Flickinger (2014), Hermann (2002), Barragán (2005), Molino (2012), Flórez (1994), Rillo (2009), Carvalho (2007) and Aguilar (2007) have each developed, with their own scopes, a proposal for the application of hermeneutics in the educational field in their countries. However, our proposal is the undeveloped application of a hermeneutic design for university education in Chile inscribed in the theoretical-practical of Mèlich, Bárcena, Esteban, Pagès among others of the Spanish tradition.

The formative need that nourishes education and configures the pedagogical experience of knowledge and learning has its origin in a sort of previous dialogue as Ipland (1999) states between an “internal logic of a dialectic of the concept with human existence” (p. 49), whose aim is to orient the subject within society and culture: education is the first link for the development of humanity and the last end that ensures the meaning of the question of what is the human being. Hence, education responds to the projection of the subject both in his existence and in culture; projected to the fullness of his existence, given form to human qualities and capacities in the cultivation of reason, of sensitivity, forging freedom and social interrelation. This projection has a mediator which is the language whose nature is dialogical and whose purpose is the understanding of meaning as a vital and humanizing experience of the initial formative need. Following Rubio (2013):

Pedagogy [university hermeneutic training] is presented as a great text that has had the purpose of orienting the future decisions of our societies and, at the same time, to progressively shape these projects in the present in a theoretical-practical conciliation inserted in the complexity of the cultural and social reality that it contributes to build, relying on the understanding and orientation (explanation and normative character of the reality thought), disciplinary features that have been deployed by configuring a particular rationality around the purposes that move it (p. 375).

Education is a life-giving and humanizing dialogue as a comprehensive experience; therefore, it requires a kind of hermeneutic primacy

in the construction of knowledge that serves as a basis for learning based on the hermeneutic-dialogical experience of pedagogical otherness. Understanding is the linguistic interpretation of the phenomena we experience in life, understood as a source of meaning. Gadamer (2004) discovers that hermeneutics is an experience broader than the consciousness of the subject. Thus, the experience of being in time, that time is the being and, as such, is the way in which human life reveals the being that understands it, since we are beings of meaning “thrown” into a world in which we co-participate in its conformation and transformation as beings of language:

It is not sovereign understanding that grants a true enlargement of our self-imprisoned in the narrowness of experience, as Dilthey assumes, but the encounter with the incomprehensible. Perhaps we never know so much of our own historical self as when the breath of totally foreign historical worlds reaches us. The fundamental character of the historical entity is to be revelatory, to be meaningful, in the active sense of the word; and to be for history is to let something be meaningful. Only in this way does [the] authentic link between the I and the thou emerge; only in this way is the binding of historical destiny constructed between us and history (p. 40).

If language exists to take positions in the world, for Gadamer (2004) the “path of truth [...] begins with dialogue, whose mode of performance always has to do with anamnesis and, with language. This is the language of conversation, awakening convictions and permanently going beyond oneself, which never allows us to understand the question completely” (p. 230), a path that involves three fundamental aspects: recognition of all others as equals; freedom to propose each one’s ideas about what can be best for all; and existential coherence between the ideas proposed and the social and civic practices of each one.

Let us ask: how does language reveal? It reveals in dialogue, because *logos* is born in conversation and there, in dialogue with the other, language manifests its true nature, dialogue as Vergara (2008a) states: “is the linguistic epiphany as totality of meaningfulness of meaning” (p. 191). No human experience is extralinguistic, i.e., generated outside the community of dialogue. Understanding and agreement with the other are achieved through dialogue, and social life is effectively performed, which is built as a community of dialogue where thought is dialogical in nature, since, as Gadamer (2001) states: “all thinking is a dialogue with oneself and with the other” (p. 96).

What we are dealing with here is the sense of the hermeneutics of the eco-relational dialogue or, in other words, what happens in modern

rationality when it tries to adjust its intradiscursive monological character of an asymmetrical individuated subject, with the interdiscursive dialogical character of a symmetrical communitarian other. This meaning is not only the object of interpretation or understanding, but it is also the object and subject of hermeneutics, since we grasp the object from the subject, which indicates that meaning is neither given by an objective truth nor put there by a subjective reason, but interposed objectively-subjectively insofar as it is a linguistic meaning, something given in relation to the subject, something objective said subjectively. This intersubjective character of dialogue responds to the co-implication between subject and world, subject and society. We bring here the image of *homo implicator* of Ortiz Osés (2003), namely, that subject who, when looking at himself, contemplates not only his own face, but also that of the other implied in his existence as a welcomed otherness (p. 114).

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The mutual recognition of the participants in the eco-relational dialogue and in the balanced and symmetrical quota of relational power protects the subject from falling into the opacities of unilateral representations of reality; also, from remaining in the contradictions inherent to any interpretation of reality; and from the domination, conversion or imposition of cultures, because identity is deployed by deploying the relational word, and a discursive or narrative unity is prolonged as a disposition of being, thinking and doing. In this sense, interculturality is an integrating dialogical challenge and, therefore, carries in itself a basic hermeneutic requirement, without which neither of the two can be understood or put into practice. For this reason, the dialogue is not a mechanical or instrumentally programmed process, but the result of recognition of each one involved in the dialogue.

Eco-relational dialogue takes place between different perspectives that harbor indisputable and incommensurable meanings of the networks of meaning that form their different social phenomena. Each one has strong networks, which function as common places or premises for argumentation and make discussion, exchange of arguments, interpretation and understanding possible. But a condition for interpretation is to assume the incompleteness of cultures. The incompleteness to which we have referred can only be seen from the perspective of the other, since one's own point of view is always marked by the intention to set one's own identity as the identity of the totality. In this sense, hermeneutics is located in the "between" of cultures.

At this point, what is the profound relationship between dialogue, education and relationship? In that they constitute the ethical-political *praxis*

of eco-relational education in its “existential cognitive form” as Fornet-Betancourt (2016, p. 19) states by pursuing epistemological and cultural justice, which makes possible a radical transformation of both the subject and society in the critical construction and equitable transmission of knowledge from a rethinking of its legitimacy. The word in dialogue corresponds to the question of meaning and as such, a word that is reciprocated, shared and committed, as Ortiz Osés (1973) conceives “active and consented word” (p. 110) that places the hermeneutic meaning in the social task of justice as a product of a critical task. As a consequence, “understanding and revision, hermeneutics and critical theory, are thus the tasks of contemporary man according to an elucidation of his own language” (p. 112). The hermeneutic reason:

It is extemporaneous, i.e., it integrates and shapes the reality it interprets. This reconstruction (co-formation) is ultimately the triumph of universal hermeneutic reason over subjective reason: the world of human experience as a totality made and to be remade is, according to what has been said, the ultimate responsible for all interpretation, the scale and guideline of all signification, the meaning -at once immersed and emergent- of subjective reason (Ortiz Osés, 1973, p. 95).

From here we differentiate semantic rationality from hermeneutic rationality. Semantic rationality has been well expressed by Habermas (2002) in his consensual theory of truth, according to which it is possible to attribute a predicate to an object only if also any other person who could dialogue with me would attribute the same predicate to the same object (p. 140). Such a semantic theory obtains truth by means of rational consensus about meaning - abstracted from signification - or utterance - abstracted from enunciation -, thus moving into the realm of things, objects or their mere functions without accessing the region of human signification of meaning; we could say that Habermas arrives at the intersubjective interpretation of reality, but not at the personal interpretation of meaning. Hermeneutic rationality is not mere functional rationality of semantically consensual meaning, but the interhuman rationality of dialogue as suture of the original cleavage of the fissure that separates other from oneself, being from entity, world and God, unconscious and consciousness, life and death, good and evil, fate and freedom, male and female, day and night; but, on the other hand, we gain the experience of the suture or mediation of the opposites through their mutual co-implication.

For Gadamer (2004) dialogue is the free and hospitable “articulation of a common world” (p. 6) where the true communal humanity of recognition and care is at stake: “This is to a greater or lesser degree, and



I emphasize it, the essential feature of all of us. To make oneself capable of dialoguing in spite of everything is, in my opinion, the true humanity of man” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 209). Understanding is expressed in dialogue and experience is related to tradition which is relational language. Only through dialogue, understanding will be linked to an action-oriented interpretation, i.e., towards the formation and change of attitudes; this understanding is made from a communicative action (Habermas), expressed from the intention of the speech of one subject with another, allowing self-formation, formation and transformation. Furthermore, dialogue is the possibility of understanding meaning as a dynamic of self-transcendence of immanence in an expansion towards the other. Dialogue inserts us in the understanding of meaning (the “thing itself”) mediated by language and not in a process intentionally directed by aprioristic rules, but, as Gadamer (2005) states “as soon as we understand we are included in an occurrence of truth and we are always too late when we want to know what we should believe” (p. 585).

For Gadamer, dialogue is the indicator of the linguistic nature of the human experience of the world where democratic, egalitarian and respectful interaction with the other indicates the capacity to understand, use and apply dialogical language for the fullness of humanity. The dialogical experience of language is the intersubjective space proper to the truth unveiled in the interaction between subjects mediated by dialogue, as Gadamer (2005) argues “conversation possesses a transforming force. When a conversation is achieved, something remains in us, and when something remains in us that transforms us” (p. 206), in which an incapacity for dialogue in the other would in fact be the recognition of one’s own incapacity for dialogue in the self. Such incapacity is not an immanent quality of human nature, therefore, it is possible to modify, to model, to educate an adequate hermeneutic-dialogical capacity of understanding the interpretation of the other. Here the hermeneutic experience reaches its authenticity as a human experience of recognition inserted in the historical tradition understood not as an objective succession of facts governed by instrumental logics of convenience and competence, but as a subjective implication of interpretations under substantial logics of coexistence and dialogicality.

## Conclusion

Current and future education is played in the exchange between subjectivities and otherness where dialogue is the mediator between the concept

and the educational experience; dialogue is the very sign of educational *praxis*, since the *ethos* of education is dialogue as, in turn, the *telos* of education is interhuman understanding.

Education is the relationship between world and word, where dialogue pops up true meaning in its diverse modalities of cohabitation of the word in the world; if phenomenologically the inter-subjective relations are unveiled in the educational sphere by putting them in parenthesis, hermeneutics dialogue opens the parenthesis before the agonizing inter-human linguistic relationship of understanding. Education is played in the showing and withdrawal of the educator, so that the meaning or complex totality of meanings that emerges from the existence of the learner may emerge. Dialogue shows the way to the meaning of existence that emerges linguistically in the hospitable experience of the word of the other. In pedagogy, does the hermeneutic process try to recognize the events of the educational *praxis* of the subjects co-involved in it who dialogue about existence, share knowledge and trace meanings? is it possible to establish dialogic hermeneutics as a model that (re)mediates differences for a life-giving recognition of the other? Is it possible to consider that the late-modernity of market competition-performance-results with all its externalization of human qualities with a whole culture of self-training, self-awareness, etc., is responsible for the weakness of communal dialogue for the collective construction of meaning?

According to Freire (1970), only an education based on dialogue as an “existential demand” (p. 107) can give meaning to its *praxis* as an understanding of the world, i.e., the purpose of education is none other than human beings understand themselves and the world. For Gadamer (2000), training for the human being is to return to his abode, i.e., to the language that protects his universal ontological condition; therefore, training entails a hermeneutic condition of origin, since language is the medium of all human experience, but that experience becomes educational only in dialogue and entering dialogue is true humanity. Education is a dialogic experience for human fulfillment, which is attenuated by the indicator of compliance of educational quality in neoliberal competition.

We consider it relevant that dialogue describes the reproductivity dialectic of the experience of historicity and finitude, i.e., of tradition, and underlies all understanding in a circuit from pre-understanding to the understanding of meaning in a perpetual oscillation of interpretative perspectives-resonances of Nietzschean perspectivism and the Heideggerian project in a continuous dialogic process of self-formation (for oneself), formation (with the other) and transformation (for the other).

Formation is played in the exchange between subjectivities and otherness, where dialogue is the mediator between the concept and the educational experience; dialogue is the sign of the educational experience. What takes place in the dialogic interaction between the world, the subject and the word is what constitutes the relational ground of humanity and, therefore, the sign of university education.

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Document reception date: April 10, 2021  
Document review date: July 15, 2021  
Document approval date: November 20, 2021  
Document publication date July 15, 2022