
Debate at the Edge of Critical Pedagogy and Rhetorical Paideia. Cultivating Active Citizens.

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In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, the on-screen teacher, John Keating, was using unconventional teaching methods, in order to exhort his students to think about themselves, the world and their position in it under a new perspective. Gaining a new perspective under which students will shape their individual way of thinking and will become critical and active citizens consists of a diachronic and essential goal of various pedagogical approaches.

Within the context of the current research, our interest will be focused on two, distant in time pedagogical approaches, which emphatically underline the need as well as the possibility of students' empowerment both as individuals and citizens: a) *rhetorical paideia* and b) *critical pedagogy*. In particular, we intend to examine whether the exchange of arguments within a *debate* may connect critical pedagogy to the teachings of classical rhetorical paideia, which begins with the sophistic movement (Egglezou, 2017). We firmly believe that such an attempt could contribute to the pedagogical empowerment of students as critical thinkers and active citizens within the modern educational system.

Before the examination of the hypotheses which lead us to the writing of the current paper, it is important to describe the axes on which debate rotates. Debating consists of a formal dialogic process of exchanging arguments – according to certain rules – between two groups of participants. The controversy is referred to a carefully and intentionally chosen wedge issue of contemporary life, which is inextricably related to the historic, political and social context in which it arises (Erickson et al., 2003). During the debate each group of participants struggles to support

the 'truth' of its position regarding the topic in an attempt to persuade the audience. Simultaneously, each group adopts a critical stance towards the 'truth' of the opposite team through the formulation of counterarguments, which refute the oppositional thesis before a reasonable audience.

It becomes obvious that debate consists of a dynamic, demanding and agonistic process or "intellectual *agon*" (Daqing, 2010, p. 6806) as well as of a particular form of public dialogue. As such, debate requires participants to develop and to perform complex intellectual and communication skills, which are interwoven with the privilege of free speech. For example, we will refer to skills such as:

- a) the active listening of opposite arguments,
- b) the direct critical analysis, deconstruction and the rebuttal of the provided argumentation through critical questions and counterarguments,
- c) the efficient linguistic support of the subjective interpretation that each team ascribes to the topic through the use of the appropriate arguments, and
- d) the dialogic communication skills, which are required during the exchange of arguments.

An initial hypothesis relative to the examination of the topic might be that debate, both as a process of inquiry and as a thesis defense through the invention of reasonable arguments and counterarguments (Freeley and Steinberg, 2009, p. 2), could easily be accepted, at the same time, by rhetorical and critical pedagogy as a teaching strategy. This is due to the fact that the two latter pedagogical approaches seem to share common ground, as it will be extensively shown in the following parts of our paper. In particular, we could support the idea that rhetorical pedagogy, through debate, offers the possibility of 'new voices' to be heard in contrast to dominant, conservative ideas. For example, we might refer to the voices of oppressed social classes, such as oppressed women or other social minority teams (e.g. refugees) due to the generation of sound arguments. In other words, we could support the idea that debate provides students with the possibility to underline social injustices and to liberate their mode of thinking from conventional, trivial and/or dominant ideas.

The participants' thoughts, released from commonly accepted patterns, create the necessary conditions for further activation and action that will ensure the intended social changes. Under this perspective, debate might be connected to the principles forming the general spirit of critical pedagogy. It might become an approach of teaching and learning language, which aims to reform the asymmetries in power and domi-

nance within the context of the existing *status quo* through the empowerment and emancipation of the oppressed (Kincheloe, 2004).

Despite all of the above assumptions, the theoretical research of the topic reveals that in the framework of critical pedagogy, debate as pedagogical practice is a questionable one, as it will be shown below. The contestation of debate stems from epistemic, ideological and/or political reasons, while its use discerns critical pedagogy from the critical thinking movement. As a result, debate is accepted as an educational strategy, essential in cultivating critical thinking (Freeley and Steinberg, 2009, p. 3). For this reason, Protagoras' *dissoi logoi* have been re-casted as modern educational practices. For example, we may recall the "believing game" and the "doubting game" of Peter Elbow (1986) that aim to cultivate students' argumentation for the truth of a topic, only to doubt it at a second level. In the same vein, Angelo and Cross (1993) use a pro/con grid in order to shortly analyze students' existing perceptions of a topic just by examining both sides of it.

On the contrary, the neo-marxist point of departure of critical pedagogy (Porfilio and Ford, 2015, p. xvi) as well as the emphasis which it places on the elimination of neo-capitalist dominant ways of thinking (such as the unequal distribution of power) and of fake social convictions (such as the conviction of equal possibility and meritocracy) – being in accordance to the basic principles and positions of the Frankfurt School – distinguish critical pedagogy from the critical thinking movement. The latter is considered as a critical approach which aims mainly at the cultivation and evolution of individual thought without a guarantee of its positive contribution to the (re)formulation of social becoming (Paul and Elder, 2002).

In this conflictual context, debate, through the lens of critical pedagogy, is considered as a tool which reproduces forms of power and rationality that represent and incorporate a systemic and trivial way of perceiving reality, because of "the antagonistic interests" (Adorno, 1974, p. 17) that agonism cultivates. As a consequence, debate strays far from the framework of critical pedagogy, while the pre-mentioned approaches are examined as distinct or even opposite aspects of the so-called trend of critical teaching (Burbules and Berk, 1999).

Furthermore, within the same context of discordance, the agonistic nature of debate is decried. Specifically, it is supported that the extended use of debate consists of an important cause for the formation of a deeply polarized, conflictual or/and polemical argumentative culture (Tannen, 1999), which has to be overcome (Tannen, 2006, p. 616) both at the level of knowledge acquisition as well as at the level of ideas' exploration through the viewing of more than two oppositional poles of ideas. Fol-

lowing the same line of thinking, Tannen stands in favour of the examination of more than two sides of a topic and proposes the cultivation of alternative dialogic ways of “expressing opposition and negotiating disagreement” (ibid., p. 627).

This critical stance towards debate imposes its further examination as pedagogical practice within the educational community. This need is underlined by the extended use of debate in social and political reality, beside the competitive debates (Edwards, 2008) that occur within the school and/or academic framework. More specifically, debate consists of a usual communication practice, which is largely exercised in a more or less formal form in various instances of the everyday professional, academic, social and political life for decision taking (e.g. in the courts, in scientific inquiries, in the administrative and political arena etc.) with significant influences not only to the sociopolitical life of smaller or larger social groups, but also to the political formation of states, which are governed by modern democratic principles where debate may influence even by taking the form of a referendum.

Additionally, to the preoccupations, which have been expressed up to this point, it is worthwhile to share the concern of scholars who emphasize the importance of the audience (Perelman, 1982) in each rhetorical situation. Indeed, during the debating process an audience of students participates in it, both as a receiver of the produced messages and as a judge of the validity and soundness of the exchanged arguments. It is supported that the argumentation provided before an audience is not only limited nor characterized by its informative function, which is to communicate to the audience information on the examined topic. Mainly, the exchange of arguments before an audience reflects the power of changing the world (Tindale, 1990, p. 84), since it depends on the final decision of the audience concerning which action will be chosen and followed regarding various topics and practices (policy debates). Therefore, under the prism of critical pedagogy, we could support the idea that debate cultivates equally to the participants as well as to the audience, “the language of critique” and “the language of possibility” (Giroux, 1997, p. x).

As it easily becomes clear, the cognitive dissonance, which stems from the afore-mentioned oppositional views, consists of the necessary ground on which we will attempt to carry out our theoretical research about the role of debate – and consequently of rhetorical *paideia* – to the intended intellectual, social, political emancipation of students, as future active citizens as well as about the debate’s relation to critical pedagogy. As a result, interesting questions are derived from this oppositional approach of debate such as:

- a) To what extent debate transforms pedagogical practice in political praxis (Giroux, 2004, p. 33) in the context of critical pedagogy?
- b) Which is the affinity between debate and the cultivation of critical citizenry? (Burke, 2013).
- c) What is the role of rhetorical paideia in general, and of debate in particular, within the modern educational context for the formation of active, responsible critical thinkers and democratic citizens?
- d) Last but not least: What is the role of educators in the students' familiarization with the pedagogical and didactic practice of debate?

In this paper, we will attempt to answer the above questions. First, a short presentation, of *dissoi logoi* (the precursor of modern debate) will occur. Secondly, the main lines that define the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy within which debate is examined will be presented in order to form a final conclusion about the value of its use in educational practice.

Rhetorical paideia and debate

Since antiquity, within the context of rhetorical paideia, emphasis was given to the power of speech, as a means of developing the identity of active citizens. Practicing the art of speech was considered a valuable supply for every citizen, who was fueled by the deep desire to acquire knowledge of civic issues and to actively become involved to the shaping of their era civilization. Among others, knowing the art of speech could help an individual achieve personal and social fulfillment through the participation of the formation of a *polis* that could ensure the human values of *arête* and of justice. In other words, we could support the idea that the principal goal of classical rhetorical paideia was the actualization of critical pedagogy's current demand for forming students who will become active participants in social transformation and, at the same time, citizens fully aware of their developed political qualities (McLaren, 2010, p. 560). Also, for classical rhetorical paideia, it was commonly accepted that the purposeful use of language by the citizens ought to facilitate their actions concerning the defense of the polis. At the same time, it should not betray the necessity of an unstoppable critical doubting of these actions (Fontana et al., 2004).

Easily, we recognize that such a form of education excluded the approaches of language teaching, which were based on the reproduction of mere knowledge. As a consequence, the invention of reasons and arguments ought to be contextual according to each *rhetorical situation* (Bitzer, 1968). In other words, language ought to be adapted to the surround-

ing conditions (economic, political, social, cultural etc.) and to converse with them if the main aim of this civic discussion was the progress of the polis.

The above conception of rhetorical paideia presents obvious similarities with critical pedagogy and, especially with the excoriation of the banking system of education, as presented by Paulo Freire, the leading exponent critical scholar in his book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000, p. 72). Both rhetoric and critical pedagogy, forcefully deny the idea that students may be parallelized to empty vessels, which have to be filled by their teacher who is keen to provide them with trivial knowledge (Shor, 1992, p. 32).

In contrast to the above mechanistic and non-humanistic approach of education for rhetorical paideia, the instruction of individuals who are getting awareness of their civic identity presupposes, among others, practices-processes, such as:

- a) posing questions,
- b) forming judgments, and
- c) negotiating opposite interests.

Through this creative and dialectic interaction, *isegoria* is guaranteed as the quality of freedom of speech for every participant in equal terms (Boniolo, 2012, p. 54). In antiquity, it was accepted that debate provided the fertile ground for the display of these processes.

Debate, as official pedagogic practice, started with the Sophistic Movement of the 5th century B.C. and, in particular, with the *dissoi logoi* of Protagoras (D. L. 9.8.53). *Dissoi logoi* were placed in the center of rhetorical paideia shading it in tones of agonism (Ong, 2002, p. 108). Also, it was commonly accepted that *dissoi logoi* could contribute to the formation of individuals, capable of examining and managing effectively personal and civic issues due to the enhancement of their argumentative skills in *logos* and *anti-logos*, that is of their capacity to invent arguments for and against an issue.

Moreover, in antiquity the practice of debate was revealing the sophistic view concerning the relativity of knowledge and the subjectivity of the so-called 'truth'. As a result, within *dissoi logoi* each thesis could be heard and, simultaneously, could be submitted to critical scrutiny developing tolerance towards the plurality of opinions (Mielczarski, s. a.) and towards otherness. Concluding, we could underline that debate was considered a deeply democratic practice that allowed the development of polyphony, the juxtaposition of arguments for a civic issue with arguments against the same issue. In this way, debate was conducting the audience,

first, to the formation of a multi-faceted approach of reality and, secondly, to the conscious choice of a decision and/or action that could effectuate the necessary changes on every debated issue.

Also, debate as *dissoi logoi* transfused the rhetorical quality both to the teaching of argumentation and to civic education. In particular, *dissoi logoi* were considered to introduce the new model of citizen, who was becoming more powerful within the democratic context of his era, by drawing on the force of their arguments and not on aristocratic or elitist rights as it was usual up to that historical moment (Poulakos, 1995, p. 14). This is the reason why the educational program of Protagoras was characterized as “political and argumentative” at the same time, while argumentation was positively judged due to its “practical efficiency” (Marrou, 1956, p. 51).

Probably, the positive impact of *dissoi logoi* to the ancient Greek audience was due to the acceptable agonistic model that was adopted in the era, since it was promoting the art of speech as “an art of response” (Hawhee, 2002, p. 185). For Protagoras, the correct decision-taking for each problematic situation that demanded a solution (*eubolia*), derived from the confrontation of at least two different subjective opinions about it and not of dogmatic truths. Another important goal for the *Father of dissoi logoi* was to conduct his students to the state of *aporia* in order to problematize them on various civic issues and to participate in the mental processes that were taking place during the critical confrontation of different views, as a necessary condition for acquiring civic virtue.

What is more, Hawhee (2002, pp. 185–6) legalizes the agonistic character of *dissoi logoi*, while she directly relates to the development of civic virtue. She supports the idea that for ancient Greeks, *agon* was not identified with any forms of competition that aimed at the victory and the prize (vs. *athlios*) but with the field on which contrary opinions could be met for pedagogical and educational reasons as well. Also, she notices that the agonistic character of the exchange of arguments and counter-arguments was related to the cultivation of students’ civic virtue, not as a goal but as “a constant call to action” (ibid., p. 187). The virtue was exposed by the participants in public with courage before the opponents, the audience and the judges who were attending the process. In other words, the element of evolution, as opposed to the acceptance of a crystallized reality, was essential to the realization of an *agon*. This view could be interwoven with Freire’s negation of Being, as the existence of a defined and fixed reality (and education) in favour of the acceptance of a constant Becoming life (Freire, 2000).

The points that have been made so far, intended to clearly reveal the organic relationship between rhetorical paideia and debate as well as the

possible interconnections between rhetorical paideia and critical pedagogy. At the same time, the above theoretical references aim to reveal the contribution of rhetorical paideia and debate to the formation of active thinking citizens within the democratic context of ancient Athens, while they reveal a deep concern relative to the possibilities of an analogous modern pedagogical use of debate.

Debate within the context of critical pedagogy

However, a question that arises is whether debate might be implemented within the context of critical pedagogy. This question becomes even more challenging if we consider that the cultivation of students' civic identity consists of a main goal for both critical pedagogy and rhetorical paideia. Regarding critical pedagogy, the need for osmosis of education with various public spheres as the political, economic and cultural (Freire, 1989; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren, 2007; Tsiami, 2013, p. 25) is considered imperative, firstly, for pointing out social inequities and injustices, and secondly, for conducting students in terms of praxis to the acquisition of active citizenship. The assurance of students' right to controversy, opposition and resistance (Crawford, 2010, pp. 817–8) through speech is considered as a necessary condition for the accomplishment of this goal.

Since the notion of conflict plays a crucial role in the context of critical pedagogy (Buffington and Moneyhun, 1997, p. 4), it would be reasonable to accept the idea that debate could easily be inserted into it. This position is strengthened by the assumption that critical pedagogy reflects a dynamic opposition to the neo-liberal status quo intending to “deconstruct” the discourse of various modern forms of hegemony and domination (social, political, economic, educational etc.) by achieving the “social transformation” (Therianos, 2014, paragraph 2) within the context of a challenging debate with sociopolitical dimensions.

As a consequence, we could accept the view that the practice of debate meets essential parameters of critical pedagogy. Among them we could include some important notions such as the following:

- a) dialogue,
- b) problem-posing education,
- c) codification and de-codification of information,
- d) conscientization and critical consciousness (Okazaki, 2005), and finally,
- e) praxis as definition of reflective action (Christiansen and Aldridge, 2013, pp. 7–9).

Introducing the point of *dialogue*, for Freire (1978, pp. 192–3), critical dialogue in the classroom as well as in society consists of an essential educational strategy for the students' liberation and emancipation. The exchange of thoughts and convictions concerning various social problems helps students to better comprehend these issues through their discursive interaction. At this point, we could support the idea that despite its regulatory framework, debate still consists of a sort of dialogic process. Independent the fact that debate takes the form of a formally organized dialogue, which is based on rules (e.g. defined number of participants, specific time for the exchange of arguments, number of questions etc.), it creates the necessary space for ensuring the equality of expression of each argumentative side within the context of mutual respect between the participants of the two teams.

Through the dialogic form of debate participants may still use discourse in order to define or, more precisely, “name the world” (Freire, 2000, p. 18), to acquire extended and deeper knowledge of social issues that face in everyday life, to critically reconsider them and to become conscious of the possibility of social change that their action might bring. In other words, debate consists of the dialogic sharing of an experience which is based upon a circular process of: a) reasoning, b) expansion of the way of thinking, c) active listening, and d) discursive interaction, that potentially might lead to the transformation of practices relative to the examined social reality by ensuring the accordance of the audience. In other words, we accept the idea that debate consists of a praxis in which the power of transubstantiation of a pedagogical idea to a social practice within real life is hidden.

Furthermore, debate may be inserted into the frame of “problem-posing education” (Freire, 1985, p. 22; Shor, 1992; Dewey, 1916). The exchange of arguments is fired by the examination of an ambivalent issue, which may be parallelized to Freire's “limit situations” (1997, p. 80), that come out within a specific historical and cultural context. Therefore, debate problematizes students on various topics that may seem familiar to them (that's the way things are) but in fact may not be. The deeper examination of such topics leads students to a re-familiarization with them. It is about the process that Ira Shor describes as “extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary” (1980, p. 93). For example, the topic of the debate may be related to:

- a) personal experiences of the students (e.g. *The state provides all students with equal educational possibilities*),

- b) general social issues (e.g. *The large inflow of refugees causes the unemployment of a country's inhabitants*), and
- c) scientific issues (e.g. *DNA mapping must be forbidden*).

According to the Shor's taxonomy (1992), we could assign the following categories of topics to:

- a) *generative* issues which stem from everyday life,
- b) *topical* issues that derive from reality and
- c) *academic* issues relative to various sciences (ibid., pp. 55, 58, 73).

Also, we could support the idea that through the exchange of arguments, all the members of the debating teams and the audience participate in the *codification* of the information that forms an enlarged picture of the examined topic. At the same time, independently of the position that each group supports, both the participants and the audience get involved with the *de-codification* of the new knowledge which has been acquired through the critical thinking and the identification with the provided argumentation (Ford, 2017, p. 3).

Furthermore, the controversy among the participants and the mutual critical test of ideas contributes to a more efficient *conscientization* (Freire, 2005, p. 15) of important cultural ideas and socio-political practices through their intense impeachment. Within this context, participants are often called to argue against the convictions that compose their individual identity. At the same time, critical awareness is developed (Freire, 2005, p. 15) in association with the creation of reasonable and critical decisions, which may lead to social changes and to the formation of a new social, economic, political and cultural reality. Within this new context, individual actions may be redefined cultivating the rhetoric and the *pedagogy of hope* (Freire, 1998). Also, debating provides participants with the possibility of resistance through discourse to an imposed *status quo* and of refutation of stereotypes and dogmatic ways of thinking. Last but not least, participation in a debate may reveal the relationships of power and dominance, which are related to the argumentation process as interactive practice in the classroom, in a family, in a job, in politics as well as in every aspect of social life.

Despite the common ground that seems to relate debate to critical pedagogy, its agonistic character might be considered as an obstacle to its use within the classroom. Following the same line as Theodor W. Adorno (1974), Colaguori (2012, p. vii) cauterizes the cultural rationalism of *agon*, as he directly correlates it to the problem of the universal domination of capitalism and to the imposition of 'truths', which reproduce so-

cial violence and injustice. He does not hesitate to compare agonism with a tool, which intends to impose dominant ideologies, to reiterate violence and the exclusion of various social groups and opinions and, finally, to reduce critical resistance to analogous socio-political pathogenicities (ibid., p. xii).

Under this perspective, the argumentative skills of the participants are used in order to persuade and/or to mislead the audience just for the victory of the one team over the other, while the exchanged opinions are restricted to two poles. On the opposite side, for critical pedagogy, open dialogue is considered the most appropriate pedagogical tool for the resolution of problems, the deliberation of actions and the transformation of deeply rooted convictions due to its polyphonic essence. The confrontation, which is observed between dialogue and debate, as pedagogical practices, reflects the diachronic conflict between rhetoric and dialectic. In contrast to the superiority of dialectic, which aims to achieve cognitive truth, rhetoric sacrifices truth at the altar of persuasion (Honnman, 2000, p. 223).

The conflict between the opposite opinions does not end at this point. On the contrary, the efficiency of dialogue, as pedagogical practice, is questioned (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 298) as well as the achievement of important communication goals. Under this point of view, it is highlighted that dialogue must be examined as a situated practice that is formatted by various parameters such as: who, when, where and how/under which conditions is conducted (Burbules, 2000, pp. 261–4).

Respectively, the limitation of students' agonistic spirit is contested. Agonism though is considered an invaluable asset on facing the inflexible bureaucratic system with which they will have to deal in their future life. For example, Bizzell points out how it is important for students not to lose "the value of challenging, opposing and resisting the interplay of social, cultural and historical forces that structure our lives" (1992, p. 284).

What has been mentioned up to this point reveals not only the confrontation between rhetoric and dialectic but that between debate and dialogue. The beginning of this conflict is situated in Plato's era and in his anti-rhetorical polemic as it is developed in his *Gorgias*, while it becomes obvious in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where the author highlights once more that "this dialogical encounter cannot take place between antagonists" (2000, p. 129, note 5) who are exhibiting "oppressor characteristics" (ibid., p. 129). Indeed, rhetoric is condemned as a means of manipulation and production of empty speech that aims at the monologic persuasion and the oppression of recipients-objects. In this case, through

propaganda, a dominant subject succeeds the so-called “cultural invasion” (Freire, 1974, p. 86) and the social injustice.

On the other hand, more moderate opinions support that the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic is complementary. In particular, Honnmann (2000), based on Aristotle, supports the idea that there is a “rhetorical foundation of dialectical reasoning in the audience’s acceptance of its premises, and of the dialectical justification of rhetoric by the corrective interplay of opposing viewpoints” (ibid., p. 233).

Adopting the same stance, we will attempt to reveal why we believe that debate is useful to be implemented among other dialogic practices in the context of critical pedagogy, for the formation of future active citizens. Our position consists of an attempt to relate the agonistic examination of reality with a conscious and cooperative decision-taking about it.

Debate and cultivation of active citizenry

The formation of active citizens is an educational need and priority. As such, it is related to the cultivation of individuals, who voluntarily and independently of the possession of positions of power, in the future, will assume roles and responsibilities for the co-formation of the sociopolitical, cultural and environmental reality in terms of justice, equity and freedom.

The speech development and the exchange of arguments regarding the view and the vision of the world through collaborative forms of deliberation, consists of a necessary prerequisite for the manifestation of desirable actions in public sphere. To achieve this goal as educators, we support the idea that we should equally encourage students’ participation in co-operative and agonistic forms of argumentation as well, in an attempt to form citizens who are not limited to a shallow and narrow imposition of ideas. On the other hand, we should promote the formation of students who struggle for the agonistic examination of emerged sociopolitical issues and who strive to ensure the “dialectic of control” (Giddens, 1979, p. 149) and the critique of domination through the analysis and rebuttal of the “discourse of power” (ibid., p. 92), when it is activated for legalizing the partial interests of the hegemonic groups (ibid., p. 187).

The basic principles of Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy will become the main argumentative source for supporting our thesis. The German-American philosopher seems to embrace rhetorical paideia and to reconcile deliberation with agonism for achieving a major, diachronic political goal: the avoidance or even the extinction of totalitarianism (Roberts-Miller, 2002, p. 598).

For Arendt, the formation of active citizens’ political conscience is a difficult attempt since important challenges arise. We could refer to the

persistent attachment to the subjective ‘ego’ that limits and thwarts the involvement to a commonly delimited action, to the reluctance of many individuals to undertake responsibilities for public issues or to their assimilation into the existing systemic power. As a consequence of all of the above, passivity, compliance and indifference towards the formation of reality arise. All these stances, when they become strengthened more or less consciously might support totalitarian forms of power, since the individuals who adopt these stances refuse to actively participate and assume responsibilities – both at a level of speech and action – for the formation of the sociopolitical and cultural context. In particular, because of the Holocaust, Hannah Arendt (1978, p. 4) scathes the unexamined facility with which hundreds of people without anti-Semitic tendencies worked for the genocide of Jews within the context of their bureaucratic duty in order to avoid points of conflict with their superiors. Also, she remarks the danger of exclusion of “spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (Arendt, 1958, p. 40). Such a peril is generated by the legalization of numerous rules and by the negative political power of assimilation, which often stems from the rigid attachment to bureaucratic rules and/or by the assimilation of the citizens’ councils and the loss of dynamics for action (Arendt, 1958, p. 219).

In these cases, Hannah Arendt, by paying the price of the critique that emphasizes an internal contradiction to the core of her political theory (Villa, 1996, p. 56), seems to accept the agonistic or even polemical spirit which is hidden under a controversy. She supports the idea that controversy ensures the necessary space of action and speech as prerequisites for the involvement in political life and to the fight of each form of totalitarianism, despite the possible dangers that may be hidden in the process of debating (Lederman, 2014, p. 329). Opposite to the idea that debate might stem from personal ambitions or that it might represent elite teams, Arendt expresses her acceptance of the speakers who because of their “passion for ideas and politics [...] [are] willing to take risks” (Roberts-Miller, 2002, p. 589) for supporting their personal action through their speech and for expressing overtly to the public sphere their ideas through the use of sound arguments. As a defender of the truth, Arendt emphasizes the use of factual arguments (*ibid.*, p. 594), while she highlights the role of values that have to permeate controversy as, for example, “the spirit of fighting without hatred and ‘without the spirit of revenge’ in combination with “indifference to the material advantages” (Arendt, 1972, p. 167). Under this perspective, rhetoric, in the context of a debate, might effectively serve the development of action in the public sphere. Also, controversy might become a protective shield against totalitarian ideas due to the

courage of a person who will raise their voice in order to be heard by the hegemonic system.

Conclusions

To conclude, debate consists of a multi-dynamic pedagogical practice. It seems that within the process of the argumentative exchange of ideas itself, huge amounts of energy are stored, capable either to reproduce or to deconstruct relations of power that are appearing in the public socio-political sphere. Under this perspective we could accept the idea that debate, as the hard core of rhetorical *paideia* has not only the character of an “intellectual game” (*jeu d’esprit*) (Huizinga, 1949, p. 51). Simultaneously, it consists of a political praxis, which may be implemented within critical pedagogy and political education, in general, since it provides students with the possibility to get out of the classroom due to the force of their speech and to be conducted, as citizens, to active action for the formation of a different and desirable reality. In other words, we support the idea of a direct relationship between debate and critical citizenry that contributes to the formation of citizens who – among others – have the capacity to evaluate reasons for and against various alternative practices regarding issues, which demand public deliberation and reasonable decisions (Siegel, 2010, p. 9).

As a consequence, the awareness of the power of debate in the political education of young students leads us to the conclusion that the educational community should be extremely attentive with regards to the terms of involvement in it, either as educators who use it as a pedagogical tool, or as students who participate in the process of assuming the role of the speaker or the audience. Also, it is important to notice that involvement in a debate does not equate to the correct language use during its process. It consists of a life stance. It presupposes the comprehension that debate is not the only form of exchanging arguments within the context of deliberative community fora. It is important for students to realize that there may be more than two sides with regards to the dialogic examination of a topic. In other words, debate must not be equated to the students’ perception of argumentation as *eristic*. Its consideration must not be limited to the invention of the appropriate arguments independent of ethical parameters and rules of reason for the accomplishment of power, fame and authority. During their participation in a debate, students are not opponents, but co-operators to the agonistic examination of the reality that they share through their experiences. Also, we support the idea that participation in a debate presupposes the prior familiarization of students and educators with a whole argumentative culture in the context of dia-

logic discussions, inquiries, fora etc., where respect and acceptance of opposing views are developed. Also, engagement in debate presupposes the teaching of essential elements of argumentation theory, regarding the production of sound arguments, as well as students' familiarization with the evaluative standards of valid arguments. Furthermore, the invention and use of arguments should express students' authentic voices and not trivial ideas, which are transferred or imposed by the teacher-expert in the context of the teaching process. Finally, we would not be exaggerating by stating that engagement in debate presupposes the existence of an unwritten contract due to which the participants will be committed to the use of reasoning and linguistic skills in terms of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* intended for the continuous improvement of themselves and of the world.

Finally, we would support the idea that such an acceptance is not contrary to basic theoretical principles of critical pedagogy. Freire highlights the negative implications of a dialogue, which is reduced to "a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants" (Freire, 2000, p. 89). Also, in *The Pedagogy of Hope*, he recalls the image of a man, who before a big auditorium supported his opinion "... speaking in a loud, clear voice, sure of himself, speaking his lucid speech" (Freire, 1998, p. 18), by drawing on the strength of his rhetoric. In other words, Freire seems to incorporate a latent power to rhetoric as Plato did the same in his *Phaedrus*, when "it is harnessed to an idealistic aim and emancipatory ethic that follows on the heels of dialogical [...] inquiry into the nature of the soul" (Crick, 2016, p. 217). Debate as a central aspect of rhetoric provides the necessary space for the formation of responsible rhetorical and political people. It is related to individuals who will not hesitate to raise their voices to support essential human rights and values in that moment of life, "when true invective is called for, when there comes an absolute necessity, out of a deep sense of justice, to denounce, mock, vituperate, lash out, rail at in the strongest possible language" as the Serbo-American poet, Charles Simic highlights (Tannen, 2009, p. 17).

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