

THE POWER OF VOICE: AN ANALYSIS OF DIALOGUE AS A METHOD IN BOTH ELEMENTARY AND ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

The core of the learner-centered approach in K-12 education is to give learners a more active role in the classroom. Accountable talk is one way of doing this. The characteristics of adult learners and the unique nature of adult education make it imperative that adult learners be actively involved in the learning process. One method adult educators have emphasized in recent years is *Andragogy* which subsists mainly in dialogue because all methods that encourage participation revolve around dialogue. Drawing extensively from literature and the author's personal experiences; this paper argues that dialogue can be and has been successfully employed as a methodology in both Elementary classrooms and adult education settings.

KEY WORDS: Dialogue, pedagogy, andragogy, empowerment, Socrates, Freire, African, traditional, and method

INTRODUCTION

One of the pillars of education at all levels is the way in which the desirable content is put across to the learner. It can be argued that method is as important as the content. And it is the method that connects teaching to learning and establishes a horizontal relationship between the two. It is also the method that defines the relationship between learners and the teacher and defines the roles of these key players in the educational process. The method has often been a foundational issue in education because it defines the power relation between the educator and the learner. The history of education indicates that teachers at the beginning of formal education preferred the 'method' of the Sophists who always maintained a grip on the learning process by reducing the learner to a passive receptor of 'knowledge'. The adoption of the method of sophistry eventually projected the teacher as an all-powerful dictator in the learning environment.

The desire to make the teacher less authoritarian and less didactic led educators like Rousseau and Pestalozzi to begin a revolution that challenged the dictatorial stance of the teacher. Both educators founded and used their schools as laboratories to experiment the child/learner centered approach to education. The core of this approach is dialogue that recognizes and allows the voice of the learner.

In K-12 education the focus is increasingly being slanted toward the learner-centered approach. The philosophical basis of learner-centeredness, as envisaged by Rousseau and Pestalozzi, is to make the learner an important stakeholder in the learning process. The active involvement of the learner, by implication, is a way of democratizing the learning process by giving more voice to the learner. Giving more voice requires some form of dialogue that enables the student to be able to 'talk with' the teacher while grappling with the content.

As far back as 1783, Nikolai Grundtvig; a theologian and the father of Danish adult education, had linked adult education with the process of highlighting the freedom and general well-being of minorities in the learning environment. In order to ensure the priority of the voice of the learner Grundtvig insisted that the vernacular, in its spoken and living form, should be the educational medium in adult education. Speaking in their mother tongue removes the constraints often imposed by a foreign language and allows adult learners to dig freely and deep into the reservoir of their experience. This same argument has been expanded by some 20th Century adult educators who have argued in favor of the learner's voice. To this school belongs Eduard Lindeman [1926] Robby Kidd [1959], John Dewey [1964], Ivan Illich [1971], Paulo Freire [1970], and Malcolm Knowles [1980]. Although these adult educators argue from different perspectives, their arguments dovetail in dialogue as a method and the need to allow the voice of the learner to be heard in the learning process.

In adult education, the involvement of the adult learner in the learning process is a *sine qua non* for the success of any program. The characteristics of the adult learner coupled with the unique nature of adult education programs make it imperative that the adult learner be actively involved in the learning process. One method adult educators have emphasized over the ages is dialogue. Indeed, some insist that dialogue is synonymous with education. For instance, Freire [1970:73] equated dialogue with education when he insisted that "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education." Beginning with definitions dialogue and method the paper proceeds to discuss two forms of dialogue. Thereafter, the paper analyzes the application of dialogue as a method in traditional African pedagogy, in K-12 and adult education. The paper concludes by arguing that dialogue is an interdisciplinary method that is applicable across age and culture barriers and that invites learners to be stakeholders in the learning process.

DEFINING DIALOGUE AND METHOD

The Greek word *dialogos* is the source of the word dialogue. In its Greek original it literally means 'conversation', 'discussion' or 'argument'. It was a way of speaking which is also called *dialectic*. It was popularized as a method by Socrates and became associated with him as the *Socratic dialectic*. For many years the Socratic dialectic was the acknowledged method of education (philosophizing). With time, other forms of the method were derived. For instance, dialectic is the supreme form of knowledge, which in *Plato's Republic* "gives an account of everything", that is, explains everything in terms of "the idea of the **Good**" [Flew, 1974:45]. Hegel also calls the logical sequence that thought must follow *dialectic*. The pattern of this dialectic is an examination of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Dialogue within this rendering is about contradiction and the reconciliation of contraction.

Method is generally considered a micro-instructional technique within the realm of the psychology of learning. The concept method is often conceded as belonging to the domain of Psychology. The ordinary dictionary defines *method* as a way of proceeding or doing something, especially a systematic or regular one. Applied to education, method is a technique of establishing praxis between the learner and the content. Thus, it is a technique of creating knowledge. Quite often, people use method in a confused manner that makes it synonymous with approach. However, an approach is more of a strategy. The distinction between method and approach is very significant because one is the framework for the other but can, nevertheless, be conceptualized quite differently. An approach can pass both as a philosophical and an administrative concept. An approach is a strategy for attacking, for instance, terrorism. Hence we can talk of the US Approach to combating terrorism or the child-centered approach. A methodology on the other hand, is supposed to be systematic and to be unambiguously clear. Dialogue and method are used in this paper within the context of our definitions above. Both dialogue and method are used in this paper to address the contradiction between the teacher and the student in both elementary and adult education.

THE SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

The content of Socratic education was how to lead "the good life". Socrates used dialogue as a method for teaching Athenians about leading the good life. The Athenian society of Socrates' time was shot through with moral degeneracy. Socrates employed dialogue as a method of transforming the

Athenian society, which was then his 'classroom'. Socrates was specifically motivated to embark on dialogue as a method in order to:

- Affirm or negated the oracle's assertion that he (Socrates) was the wisest person on earth.
- Put an end to the relativistic and immoral teachings of the Sophists.
- Empower others to think critically by stimulating them to think.

Socrates was interested in knowledge that will equip individuals with moral and intellectual power. The overall objective of his method was to discover indubitable knowledge in dialogue with fellow Athenians. Socrates was affirmed as the supreme teacher by the Delphian oracle that informed Socrates through Chaerophon (a friend of Socrates) that there was none wiser than Socrates. To the contrary, Socrates conceived himself as an intellectual 'midwife' "out to bring other men's (and women's) thoughts to birth, to stimulate them to think and to criticize themselves, not to instruct them. The central focus of the Socratic midwifery is to help others to generate true ideas that can help them to right conduct. By projecting himself as an intellectual midwife, Socrates was: (i) de-emphasizing the domineering role of the teacher as epitomized by the Sophists and (ii) emphasizing the important role of the adult learner (indeed any learner) in the learning process. The shift of emphasis from educator to learner was to help learners create knowledge that can be applied. The end objective is to know and live the good life. This is the thrust of adult education as a practical and purposeful discipline.

The Athenian society in which Socrates lived was a closed one where a small class of aristocrats pursued learning as the main vocation of their adult lives. The acknowledged educators were the Sophists who commercialized knowledge and 'sold' it to those who could afford it. The Sophists capitalized on their monopoly of the sale of knowledge to introduce and encourage relativistic moral values that eventually led to a general moral degeneracy in Athens of Socrates' time. Thus, Socrates was interested in behavior change through engaging individuals in dialogue and helping them deliver knowledge that would help improve the quality of their lives and *ipso facto* that of the Athenian society. This method was his way of combating the negative influence of the Sophists on the intellectual and moral life of Athens. The dialogue is tantamount to the use of a good method to combat ignorance and make the creation of indubitable knowledge easier. Socrates' use of dialogue was like what Laubach [1960] termed 'the each-one-teach-one' approach to literacy. In engaging individuals in dialogue, Socrates used tenacious questioning to put pressure on his interlocutors to think deeper beyond shallow knowledge. In order to keep his 'hold' on his interlocutors, Socrates sometimes applied the 'Socratic Ignorance' and pretended to seek information from them. With the Socratic ignorance he piled up questions and allowed the other person to do most of the talking. The Socratic ignorance was his way of allowing the voice of his interlocutor to be 'louder' than his. Allowing the voice of the interlocutor was not by any means allowing the dialogue to get out of control. Indeed, he would ensure that he kept "the course of the conversation under his control, and so would expose the inadequacy of the proposed definition" [Copleston, 1962:127].

In summary, the Socratic dialogue was a method of drawing out individuals to entrust their valuable ideas to conversation and to see themselves as creators of true knowledge. The Socratic dialogue as a method repositions the educator as an intellectually humble companion who joins others to create knowledge. Furthermore, his method projects the learner as someone who should be entrusted with and given sufficient power to create knowledge.

The Socratic dialogue has been criticized as a negative method that tends to ridicule the interlocutor. Any negative method is assumed to be destructive in the educational process. Using the *Elenchus* as an example, Babarinde [1993:38] criticized the Socratic Method for not passing the test of an educational method. According to him: "*any methodology that rests on a negative approach to learning would not pass the test of method criterion of teaching advocated by progressivism, naturalism, and modern educational psychology.*" The method has also been criticized for being time-wasting. This criticism of time wasting is said to be especially true in K-12 settings where teachers have large classes to contend with. However, a deeper look at the Socratic Method reveals an application of the *indirect method*, which is not tantamount to negativity. The use of this method enjoins the teacher to recognize learners as partners who are capable of creating new knowledge. And that; learners are recognized as individuals who can proceed from the known to the unknown. The thrust of the Socratic Method is to guarantee the learner some of the powers in the learning situation. Woodruff [1998: 23] argued that "the role of Socrates, on this theory, is to jog people into recalling knowledge which is already theirs". The essence of the Socratic Method is thus to underline the fact that knowledge belongs to both learner and teacher. The

Socratic Method establishes dialogue as the mediating factor (classroom referee) in the redistribution of power between the teacher and the learner. The method creates space for and asserts the individual as a capable creator of knowledge. By giving power to the learners' voice the Socratic dialectic re-presents knowledge as a personal achievement wrought about through continual self-criticism. This redistribution of power is a radical departure from the conventional presentation of knowledge as the acceptance of a second-hand opinion that the teacher hands out to learners.

DIALOGUE IN FREIRE'S METHOD

Paulo Freire's educational philosophy and method were first applied within the socio-political context of his native Brazil. In his method of *conscientization* Freire underlines dialogue as being synonymous with education. Like Socrates, Freire's application of dialogue was influenced by the socio-political and economic conditions prevalent in Brazil. Specifically, Freire's dialogue was located in human struggle aimed at 'reclaiming' the place of the ordinary people in the affairs of Brazil. The ordinary Brazilian was known to have been severely suppressed by the apparatus of government. Freire drew an analogy between the social environment and what happens in the teaching and learning environment. He equates the inhibitions imposed by social structures with those imposed by a didactic teacher in a learning environment. At the political level, the restrictions manifest in fear and a *culture of silence*. This culture of silence is applicable in any learning situation where the learner is reduced to a passive receptor of knowledge.

In order to effectively challenge and upturn the culture of silence there has to be a process of 'conscientization' that uses dialogue to rescue learners from the limitations imposed by silence and to empower them to recognize the power of their voice. The power-hungry educator imposes the culture of silence in order to limit the learners' voice and to 'mystify' the purpose and content of education and indeed the whole of reality. The process of empowering learners to challenge the culture of silence begins with the initiation of dialogue with and among oppressed learners. Freire's use of dialogue in adult education begins when the oppressed, as learners, come together under a new institution of popular culture [Avoseh, 1993]. This culture provides oppressed learners the opportunity to 'regain' their voice as they dialogue with their peers. Learners seize the opportunity of the dialogue to acquire the power to name reality and to create and apply knowledge from their own world view. The dialogic environment negates an atmosphere of monopoly of voice and knowledge, which has hitherto been the prerogative of the educator. The new setting compels the educator to join learners in dialogue and embrace the reality of a democratic learning environment where everyone's voice is aloud to be heard. The combined voices of previously 'silenced' learners denounce the *culture of silence* and affirm the right (and indeed obligation) of everyone in the dialogic environment to say 'true words'. This is the start of the process of self-empowerment by learners. This process of conscientization is sustained by the power of voice and cannot survive "in silence, but in word, in action-reflection" [Freire, 1970:61]. Dialogue is thus established as the end of the culture of silence and the start of the process of empowerment in the learning environment. As a Freirean method, dialogue is an educative/learning encounter in which both educator and learners have the right to interpret the world and to create knowledge.

Applied to adult education, Freire establishes a direct link between dialogue as a method and the entire aim of adult education. He argues that the main aim of adult education especially in oppressive environments is to empower learners through dialogue. This aim is so important that Freire [1970:65] equates dialogue with education and concluded that "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education". For dialogue to lead to true education it must 'require critical thinking' and be 'capable of generating critical thinking' [ibid.]. To ensure that the content of dialogue is the same with the 'program content of education' and that dialogue serves as a method for learner empowerment Freire established conditions that are imperatives for critical dialogue that leads to true education. Central to the conditions are love, humility, faith, trust, hope, critical thinking ([Freire, 1970:62-65]. These conditions are like 'guidelines' that regulate dialogue as a method that encourages the power of voice and defines the educator-learners and learners-educator relation. It is also an advocacy for:

"a synthesis between the educator's maximally systematized knowing and the learners' minimally systematized knowing-a synthesis achieved in dialogue. The educator's role is to propose problems about the codified existential situations in order to help the learners

arrive at a more and more critical view of their reality. The educator's responsibility as conceived by this philosophy is thus greater in everyway than that of his/her colleague whose duty is to transmit information that the learners memorize since education for him/her does not mean an act of knowing."[Freire, 1985:55].

Freire establishes the *circulo de cultura* (culture circle) as the theoretical context for dialogue as a method. The culture circle serves as a context for elaborating this act of knowing that pivots on the joint voices of the learners and the educator. This act of knowing is directed by the conditions established for a dialogic relationship based on democratic ideals of the 'second amendment'. The most fundamental of all the conditions for a meaningful dialogue is *love*. Love is a commitment to other learners engaged in dialogue. It is an act of courage that emboldens those engaged in dialogue to be unwavering in the process of transforming an undesirable world. Freedom and objectivity are basic concomitants of love as a criterion of dialogue. Love focuses on both the learners (oppressed) as well as the educator (oppressor) because it is the most inclusive of all the criteria stipulated for dialogue. Indeed "love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself". Furthermore "if I do not love the world¹-if I do not love life-if I do not love men/women-I cannot enter into dialogue" [Freire, 1970:62]. Dialogue is thus an encounter between learners and educator based on love and aimed at creating knowledge. If we grant the assertion above then; all other criteria enumerated by Freire fall into place. An educator who embraces the condition of love cannot meaningfully engage in dialogue with an air of intellectual pride that limits the learners to 'empty heads' who have nothing significant to contribute to dialogue. Intellectual pride negates the condition of *humility* that makes it imperative for those engaged in dialogue to eschew intellectual self-sufficiency and not to see themselves as the infallible custodian of knowledge and truth [Avoseh, 1991:142]. Logically, if humility is a necessary condition and knowledge is not the prerogative of anyone then; it follows that the educator (in spite of his/her intellectual superiority) must have *faith* in the learners' ability to contribute to the creation and growth of knowledge and faith in the learners' commitment to the whole enterprise of knowledge.

Whereas love, humility and faith are conditions without which dialogue cannot begin; *trust* is not a precondition *per se*. Trust emanates from dialogue that is founded on the criteria of love, humility and faith. Honesty of purpose oozes out of dialogue as it progresses. If dialogue is based on genuine love, then all other conditions, including trust become complementary. Freire [1970:64] insists that "it would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue-loving, humble and full of faith-did not produce a climate of mutual trust, which leads the people involved into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world". If dialogue based on love, humility and faith rises up to the level of building trust then participants must hope for it to be fruitful because "dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the participants expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and sterile" [ibid.]. Freire [1985:58] further contends that this hope is "utopian" and it "is engagement full of risk". Part of the risks involved in dialogue full of hope is the ability to think in a way that 'perceives reality as a process and transformation... (and) does not separate itself from action...'. Consequently, *critical thinking* is a necessary condition for dialogue. Critical thinking in dialogue involves a thorough analysis of reality and the means to transform it. Only dialogue based on critical thinking can produce a critical mind. It is a combination of all the elements above that makes dialogue a method that serves as a catalyst for drawing out the creative potentials innate in individual learners. Dialogue as a methodology is a challenge to the educator with dictatorial tendencies. It is a negation of the all-powerful and knowledgeable educator who forces knowledge down the intellectual throats of innocent learners. It is in this sense that dialogue as a method leads to *authentic education* and is indeed synonymous with authentic education. Freire [1972:66] concludes that:

"Authentic education is not carried on by A for B or by A about B, but rather by A with B, mediated by the world-a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it."

As a method in adult literacy education Freire's dialogue is carried out in three phases. The first phase is the composition of the *culture circle*. This phase is fundamental and determines the success or otherwise of the dialogic method. It is incumbent on the educator/facilitator to handle this phase with the utmost care. It is at this level that the initial inventory of words emanating from the dialogue is compiled. The compilation of the inventory is guided by choice of words most charged with existential meanings. The first phase heralds the unveiling of the learners' thoughts, problems, aspirations and fears. The second phase is a stage of 'provocation' that provides the learners the stimulus to relocate their voice and

to begin to break free from the jinx of the *culture of silence*. As the dialogue progresses through the second phase the educator/facilitator further sifts the inventory of words on the basis of phonemic richness and pragmatic content. Visual aids are introduced at the third phase of the dialogue. These aids are mainly cards and pictures. The pictures are often pictorial representations of the learners' environment and existential situations that contain coded problem scenarios that challenge the learners' ability to think critically. Freire introduces pictures and cards at this stage of the method to establish a link between the abstract and the concrete; between theory and practice. It is his way of establishing power and education as being concrete and coincidental. This phase is a bridge that links the content of education "with the aim of addressing issues of social justice, poverty, gender inequality, domestic violence and a host of other socio-economic problems" [Avoseh, 1999:98].

One major criticism against Freire's application of dialogue is that it is utopian in its approach. It is presented as a one size fits all method. "There is no sign of individualization in that (Freire's) educational approach, instead a simple formula approach is advocated, one that treats all situations alike and promises to help all oppressed people by removing their oppressors" [Griffith, 1991:1]. This criticism seems to be informed by either a misunderstanding or misinterpretation (or both) of Freire's method. The crux of his method is the insistence that all people must ultimately rely on themselves for self-development and that making the rich poor is not the way to make the poor rich. Applied to the educational setting; it is that the learners must be active and important partners with the teacher. It does not recommend removing all teachers as a solution to the culture of silence that characterizes most learning environments. It is, as is the Socratic; a call to celebrate the learners' voice.

Dialogue in Traditional African Pedagogy

Central to most indigenous African education is the forms of dialogue that are clustered into the methods. Dialogue is central because the methods of traditional African education "were largely oral". In traditional African pedagogy learning was inseparable from life because the whole community was the 'classroom' and there existed a triadic relation between the learner, the community and the educator. Anyanwu [1983:102] calls it "the best way of knowing because the subject, the object, and the medium of expression are fused together". The relation is such that dialogue between the three results in the accumulation of experience by the learner. That experience and its application is the ultimate measure of knowledge and education. It is this experience that forms the basis of the individual learner's link with reality. In his analysis of the African mode of knowing Anyanwu [ibid:101] argued that "reality in African culture is self-experienced or personally experienced, that the self is inseparable from that which is experienced; hence, the African does not make a clear-cut distinction between the subject and the object". This process of education is personal and lively. Oral pedagogy is the method that ensures that the process of education never ceases. All areas of human endeavor form the content as well as the avenue for teaching and learning. Elaborating on the oral format of the methods of indigenous African education Salia-Bao [1989:85] observed that:

"Ideas and information were passed on in casual conversation around the household, on the farms, or wherever there was the need to transmit ideas or facts unknown or unclear to the learner. Oral pedagogy also made widespread use of folk tales, moral stories and proverbs, as well as singing."

Salia-Bao further emphasized the significance of 'observation, imitation and participation'. Imitation and participation are important elements of dialogue as a method in traditional African pedagogy because both provide the opportunity for learners to concretize the content of education that was heavily located in the oral traditions. "Such oral traditions, narrated with care and repetition, additionally constituted the African child's training in what was often a complicated linguistic system without a script" [Ansu Datta, 1984:3].

Dialogue as a method in traditional African pedagogy helped to make education pragmatic by encouraging the learners to think- usually from a known premise (concrete life situations) to an unknown – and to rely on their experiences and the environment as the foundation for knowledge. The method of dialogue helped to make learning meaningful and to make it easy for knowledge to be applied. Salia-Bao [ibid: 85] concurred that all these methods revolving around dialogue in African traditional pedagogy "made the learner more active, responsive and interested in learning". It must be noted however that dialogue as a method in indigenous African education is not limited to the spoken word. It is complex and all-involving. Omolewa et al [1998:17] observed that:

“Dialogue in traditional education is a praxis. It involves the whole of the people’s culture, religion and other activities. In most case, dialogue means being involved in all the community does. In fact, it is mainly through dialogue with the rest of the society that an individual becomes more educated and truly human.”

One common element of the use of dialogue as method as discussed in the Socratic, Freirean and traditional African perspectives is the active involvement of the learners in the teaching/learning process. The method, even in a traditional pedagogy, highlights the significance of the learner as one whose voice and experiences give meaning to learning and as well as being the source of knowledge.

Dialogue in K-12 and Adult Education:

The reference to methods in K-12 and adult education are usually defined and woven around the learners. Quite often the debate has always been between *Pedagogy* and *Andragogy*. The elements that permeate the pedagogy/Andragogy divide are the *learner*, *content*, and the *educator/teacher*. These elements are used to justify the application of pedagogy in K-12 and Andragogy in adult education.

Pedagogy is often assumed to be used in reference to K-12 teaching. Pedagogy as an English word is derived from the Greek words *paides* (children) *agogus* (leader, teacher). It is thus a method of leading/teaching children. It is “an activity involving the purposeful creation of learning experiences that will either organize or disorganize the meaning systems or stocks of knowledge of the learners in a variety of ways” [Jarvis, 1990:261]. It is in this sense that pedagogy is generally assumed to be a method for teaching children and usually associated with formal education. Pedagogy is based among others, on the premise that the teacher is the prime determinant of what happens in the process of education. The teacher is a leader who has knowledge and has an absolute control of the process. Jarvis [2001:149-149] describes the teacher here almost as a dictator who determines what the learners should learn, how best to learn it, creates the learning context and dictates the pace of learning.

The pedagogical teacher also assesses the extent of learning and rewards success or punishes failure accordingly. Since the teacher is the most active the children are expected to be passive and depend on the teacher for knowledge. In a comparison of the assumptions of pedagogy and andragogy Jarvis [ibid] further explain that passivity is expected of learners because they come to the learning environment with very little or no experience, their readiness to learn is controlled by society so the content has to be uniformly organized. Furthermore, the children want to acquire subject-matter content so their learning should be based on subject-matter units. So, the whole process is subject-oriented and teacher-centered. In a teacher-centered environment the learners’ voices are rarely heard and even when heard they are of no consequence in the learning environment. These assumptions of pedagogy negate the key values of adult learners and adult education. Consequently it is generally agreed that pedagogy is inappropriate for adult education².

Andragogy derives from the Greek stems *andres* (men³) and *agogus* (leader, a teacher); andragogy is then ‘the teaching of men’ or ‘the teaching of adults’. The emergence of andragogy was in way a reaction to the assumptions of pedagogy and the conclusion that adults cannot be meaningfully taught the same way children are taught. Jarvis (2001:149) traces the history of the term to Alexander Knapp, a German school teacher who first used the term in 1833. Knapp was said to have used the term to refer to Plato’s educational theory⁴. However, it was Malcolm Knowles [1970] who popularized andragogy as a concept in adult education. Knowles defines andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn”.

Andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn is, according to Knowles [1970:39], based on the following assumptions:

- i. *high self-concept*: the adult learner’s self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality to one of being a self-directed human being;
- ii. *bundle of experience*: the adult learner accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning;
- iii. *social expectations*: the adult learner’s readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles; and
- iv. *immediacy of application*: the adult learner’s time perspective changes from one postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.

These assumptions of Andragogy tally with the basic principles underlying learning and teaching in adult education. First is the adult learner’s age and experience that entitle him/her to be an active

participant in the process of learning/teaching. His/her participation is vital even at the level of program or content planning. The adult learner has a much higher self-concept and dignity that makes it imperative for him/her to be treated with much more civility, and courtesy that are rarely extended to children in their learning and teaching settings. Another significant factor that arises from the assumptions of Andragogy is the degree of freedom that the adult learner has. This level of autonomy makes the adult learner the one who has the final decision about enrolment in and withdrawal from a program. A corollary to this is the level of social commitment of the adult learner. The level of the learner's social commitments and responsibility make the need for situational relevance of the knowledge and or skill non-negotiable. The need for situational relevance compels adult education to be almost entirely need-based as opposed to being preparatory as in the K-12 setting. The educator in an andragogical setting cannot be the one 'fully in charge' because the assumptions of Andragogy put the emphasis on the learner and learning. With the emphasis on the learner and learning the learner takes the center stage in the activity of learner. This role of the principal actor makes the voice of the adult learner the most significant in the learning process. The principal actor role of the learner plays down the voice and role of the teacher who is just an adult among other adults. If we grant this then it follows that the teacher is compelled to employ strategies that allow the voice and experience of the learners. The teacher's method has to make adequate room for the learners' experience as a source of a richer and more varied knowledge. Indeed, at this stage, most adult educators that subscribe to Andragogy prefer concepts like adult educator, facilitator, catalyst and animateur instead of teacher. Because of the helping role of the adult educator in adult learning both teaching and learning become participatory. The element of participation is again one of the differentiating factors of adult education from other areas of education especially K-12. So, Andragogy has been embraced by some adult educators not just because of its dialogic import but also because it helps define adult education as a unique field. The validity of this role of Andragogy has remained a subject of much debate and controversy in adult education.

Although Andragogy has been generally accepted as 'the method' of adult learning there has been no scientific prove of its efficacy. Indeed "little empirical work has been done to test the validity of its assumptions or its usefulness in predicting adult learning behavior" [Merriam & Caffarella, 1999:276]. Another set back of Andragogy; it has also been argued, is that the adult learners' textbook (their experience) is not necessarily a guarantee for quality learning. Indeed such an experience may sometimes constitute an obstacle to learning [Merriam et al 1996]. Indeed this criticism goes with the logic of the common saying 'gone were the days when old age was equal to wisdom'. There is also the criticism of Andragogy over-emphasizing the role of the individual in the learning situation and oblivious of the all-important role of the socio-economic and the political context. All the arguments against Andragogy may be tenable in certain respects. There is however no logical trend in the arguments of critics to counter the significance of dialogue as a method. Our argument in this paper is that the dialogical benefit of Andragogy is a logical method in education especially in adult education. Dialogue based on the assumptions of Andragogy provides the educator with the opportunity to, according to Freire [1985:56] "engage the learners in the constant problematizing of their existential situations". In the instance of adult learners who are learning in a dialogic group, the dialogic group "functions as the theoretical context" [ibid].

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The arguments in favor of Andragogy have been mainly to create a niche for adult education as a unique field and to draw a line between the teaching of children and learning in adult education. It is in this sense that Andragogy has been mostly contrasted with pedagogy. The argument in this paper is based on the premise that dialogue as a method is not bound by the limitations of Andragogy and pedagogy. Rather, dialogue extracts the dialogic and other benefits of both Andragogy and pedagogy. Dialogue as a method is not however necessarily the same as what Knudson [1979] is cited to have called *humanagogy*. Knudson's *humanagogy* is presented as a universal theory of learning based on certain characteristics of the learners as 'humans'. It is a "theory of learning and not a theory of 'child learning', 'adult learning' or 'elderly learning'. It is a theory of learning that combines pedagogy, Andragogy and gerogogy and takes into account every aspect of presently accepted psychological theory" [Jarvis 2001, p.152]. The debate contrasting Andragogy and pedagogy highlights the authoritarian stance of the teacher in one and the facilitating role of the teacher in the other. However, it is not always

the case that learners always learner with a teacher who plays the role of a facilitator or that learners never learner with an authoritarian teacher. The focus on this trend of argument looses the import of the power of voice that is inherent in dialogue as an integral bridge between teaching and learning. Knowledge arises from a fruitful blend between teaching and learning. The quality of the blending depends to a large extent on the quality of the dialogue between the learner and the teacher/educator.

In K-12 setting dialogue becomes effective as a method when the teacher becomes what Freire and Macedo [1995, p.3] refer to as a “dialogical educator who can illustrate the object of study”. Illustrating the object of learning is a prerequisite for learning. Nuthall [2004, p.278] identified a similar prerequisite when he argued that “for students to learn, they must individually experience an appropriate sequence of cognitive processes”. From a personal experience in K-12, the object of study and the avenues for ‘sequence of cognitive processes’ include the socio-economic and cultural factors that the child encounters on a daily basis before and after school. The object of study in K-12 should include everything that happens within the building and to which children have access and ‘knowledge’. The object of study should include what happens before class, on the line, in the gym, in the lunchroom, in the playground, in the hallway and of course, what happens in the classroom. These are the sources of the learners’ experience and these give form and meaning to abstract domains like mathematics and or the sciences.

The ability of the teacher to use these aspects of the learners’ world to illustrate the object of study is at the same time an invitation to dialogue. This use of the learners’ world is akin to Nuthall’s [ibid] assertion that “the teacher facilitates a sequence of experiences by requiring a student to engage in classroom activities”. The teacher is in a better position to do this if the domains that give meaning to the learners’ daily life are linked to the classroom activities. Because these are domains that the teacher may not have a monopoly of knowledge; the learners ‘open up’ and contribute their voice in the process. Creating a room for their voice is the first step to empowering them to become co-creators of knowledge irrespective of the teacher’s authority and obligation to teach the depth and breath of the curriculum. Encouraging and allowing the voice of learners to be heard is a way of connecting to the best of the human-ness in them. Learners are in a better position to be empowered when they know that the teacher is genuinely interested in their voices as being important in the classroom. It is a huge influence on learners and it makes easy the task of teaching. As Nuthall [p.295] concluded “influencing student minds, directly or indirectly, is the primary purpose of teaching”. Dialogue is a method that invites the learners to have high self-confidence, trust their teacher and approach learning with open minds. These are necessary conditions for learning that is a way of creating knowledge.

In adult education there are theories and models that continue to constantly tend toward paradigm shift in ‘helping adults learn’. In all the theories, the slant is heavy towards learning. The key theories of adult learning in recent times include the *Behaviorist*, *Cognitive*, *Humanist*, *Social Learning* and *Constructivism* orientations [Merriam and Caffarella 1999]. In spite of the differences in all the theoretical orientations to learning there is no contending the place of the adult learner as an active participant in adult education. Dialogue as a method seems to be the universal thread that runs through all adult teaching and learning models. It is in dialogue that the educator of adults simultaneously takes the place of a learner and the learners also simultaneously take the place of the educator. This is where “the curiosity of the teacher and the students, in action, meet on the basis of teaching-learning” [Freire 1997:p.81]. Dialogue as a way of knowing provides the basis for the interaction of action and reflection; a praxis that is sustained by what Freire et al [1995, p.6] call “epistemological curiosity”.

The trend of the argument in this paper has been to explore the uses of dialogue in different theoretical and social contexts. The historical antecedent presents dialogue as a way of engaging individuals in intellectually challenging discussions that stimulate the ability for critical thinking. Dialogue has also been discussed here within the purview of some theories of learning especially in adult education. The thrust of the references to other theories is to underline the fact that most learning/teaching theories subscribe to some form of dialogue. In all the cases; the import is to use dialogue to create more social and intellectual space for learners irrespective of age or academic discipline. As a method, dialogue appeals to contents at all levels and in almost all contexts. Dialogue is meaningful and applicable in almost all settings where education involves human beings as *Homo sapiens*. Dialogue as a method in education-from Pre-kindergarten through adult education- strives to use “the whole person” of the learner Vella [2002, p.149]. In using the whole person of the learner; dialogue allows the voice, likes, dislikes, environment and the learner’s experience (no matter how minimal) to interact with the content through the guidance of the teacher. I have argued in this paper that dialogue as

a method is not limited by age or discipline. Age, discipline and other considerations may vary the tone, phases, and guiding principles of dialogue in certain contexts. Nevertheless, dialogue invites the learners to meaningfully be stakeholders in the process of learning and thus empower the learners to bridge the gap between teaching and learning. It is the learners' voices that make dialogue an empowering method and sets the teacher free from the suspicion that s/he represents oppression.

ENDNOTES

1. Freire uses the concepts world, men, women, and life synonymously.
2. here are some instances of the use of *adult pedagogy* and *social pedagogy* in adult education in preference to the term *andragogy*. Jarvis (1990:261) cites the example of Sweden where pedagogy is used in reference to how adults learn to work in small groups.
3. 'Men' is used in a metaphorical sense here and it is synonymous with adults.
4. It is most likely that Knapp may indeed be referring to the Socratic dialectic. Socrates did not put his ideas into writing but Plato (Socrates' student) put most of his teacher's thought into writing and it is sometimes difficult to separate Socrates from Plato in Plato's philosophy.

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