



Rhetorical ‘paedeia’ in modern educational settings: From theory to praxis... again

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Abstract: The current paper intends to call for an educational rhetorical turn in school practice in the modern educational settings. This goal will be achieved at two levels: theory and praxis. Firstly, at the theory level, the diachronic value of rhetorical *paideia* (παιδεία) / pedagogy will be shown through the examination of its classical teachings as diachronic sources for empowering the learning and teaching process. Also, the correlation of classical rhetoric to the principles of modern pedagogical theories, will show the inborn pedagogical nature of rhetoric and its main essential qualities.

Secondly, at the praxis level, reference will be made to the use of various oral rhetorical activities as implemented in classrooms world-wide. Interpretive reading, practice in impromptu speech, exhortative speech and, mainly, in argumentation represent modern features of rhetorical *paideia*. Undoubtedly, within the core of rhetorical *paideia* stands the teaching of argument through various linguistic games and forms of debates, affirming the Protagorean conception that *dittoi logoi*/(*debate*) still consist of a precious pedagogical and epistemic methods, which increase students’ knowledge in various fields about the word and the world.

Nowadays, more than ever, it is necessary for educators and students to rehabilitate the relationship between education and rhetoric. In contrast to stagnant curriculums, monotonous teaching practices, passive approaches to learning and to life, rhetorical *paideia* is, still, the only revolutionary educational approach for the formation of skillful, integral, critical persons, who may affront effectively the challenges of life both as individuals and as collective characters in the modern world.

Keywords: rhetorical *paideia*/pedagogy, theory, praxis, interpretive reading, impromptu speech, exhortative speech, argumentation, *dittoi logoi*/(*debate*).

Introduction

“Make it New”. Ezra Pound’s invitation to renovation may indicate a personal change, but, it may, also, be identified as a regeneration of art, as a social or/and educational reform. In like manner, it might signal the rehabilitation of the relationship between education and rhetoric. Indeed, it would be very interesting to examine how rhetoric could be used into modern educational settings for enhancing students’ “*facilitas*” [1] through the production of effective language messages in any real life-situation.

The warrant of such an examination is obvious. For as long as human communication exists in either verbal or written forms, “in practice” education will always be rhetorical “in that it uses some device to try to affect the thoughts, actions or emotions of an audience” through **Logos**, as George Kennedy comments [2]. In this sense, the need for a liberal arts education adapted to the exigencies of the modern reality as well as the need for a renovated rhetorical education becomes



overwhelming and imperative, since both are necessary for the formation of “... a specific, coherent, intellectual and moral character” [3] of students.

Renovated education has nothing to do with stagnant curriculums, monotonous teaching practices, passive approaches to learning and life. Modern education should prepare students for the change and the uncertainty of the present and of the coming decades. Thus, modern education should form thinking individuals as social agents. In order to achieve this goal, education should once again become *paideia* (in Greek *παιδεία*), “if we take it to mean the development of a conscious ideal of education and culture” [4]. Probably, Cicero would call it *humanitas*. Independently of the term which may be used, *paideia* has always been related to the exigencies of a culture within a certain time and space. It has, also, been connected to the development of the human existence as an agent of her culture and undoubtedly, *paideia* consists of a precious asset to one’s individual and social life. So, Menander, the ancient Greek dramatist used to say that “the possession which no one can take away from man is *paideia*” [5].

It would be a common topic to say that *paideia*, throughout history, has always been connected to the teaching of rhetoric. Since the era of Corax and Teisias, a pleiad of teachers of rhetoric has made serious attempts to achieve this ideal. As a consequence, a long tradition of rhetorical *paideia* or rhetorical pedagogy has been created. Independently of the discrete character of each teacher or movement, rhetorical education has always contributed to the formulation of “a particular kind of person” [6] of his era, who is presented as “engaged, articulate, resourceful, sympathetic, civil”, having cultivated “ethically framed, action oriented, intellectual capacities” in the course of being “trained in, conditioned by and devoted to what once was called eloquence” [7].

If we try to examine the main teachings of rhetorical pedagogy in the past, it might be possible to understand better in which way rhetorical *paideia* could empower modern pedagogy, learning and teaching practices. Through this brief paper, I will try to sketch out the reasons for which I firmly believe that rhetoric is deeply pedagogical and because of which it should penetrate the daily teaching and learning strategies in classroom.

Theoretical Review

The pedagogical dimensions of rhetoric

The first reason which justifies the introduction of rhetoric into the modern educational settings might be that rhetoric is pedagogical by nature. Its existence is interwoven with the cultivation of *Logos* (*λόγος*) [in Greek]. The term derives from the verb *λέγω* [in Greek] = (*to speak*) and it reflects both rationality and speech in their interdependency for making meaning through the use of language [8]. Since *Logos* is the main characteristic which differentiates humans from animals, rhetoric as the art (or *techne* / *τέχνη* [in Greek]) of *Logos*, aims at the development of human’s full development both at the reasoning and speaking level. In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *logos*, consists of one of the three artistic means through which persuasion is achieved. For Aristotle, rhetorical *logos* is connected to reasoning [9] through the *enthymeme* and the *example* and it is mainly expressed by the invention and delivery of arguments.

The second reason supporting that rhetoric itself is pedagogical is due to the fact that it energizes one’s entire human existence. A man who is seeking to discern “the possible means of persuasion in each particular case” [10] appeals not only to reason that is to his intellectual capacities. Keeping in mind that the appeal to *ethos* was equally considered of major importance,



since it equated to the expression of a moral character (*arête/αρετή*), to sound sense (*phronesis/φρόνησις*) and to benevolence (*eunoia/εὐνοία*). It is worth referring to Quintilian, who believed that the orator represents primarily a “vir bonus” [11], since an ideal orator should possess an integral character. Last but not least, the appeal to *pathos* or the emotional appeal, was considered to cultivate the consciousness on the importance of human emotions in decision-making and in action. In parallel, the appeal to emotions, among others, is teaching how emotions should be wisely mastered in order to judge critically other’s propositions and plans. Through the consciousness of the above three main appeals each person acquires both self-knowledge and knowledge of the persons who surround him. In this way, the communication skill of empathy is enhanced through defining, understanding, and reacting to the concerns and needs that underlie others’ emotional responses and reactions [12].

The third reason which reveals the pedagogical character of rhetoric is the enhancement of linguistic skills, both in speaking and writing. If we follow Cicero’s [13] teachings on the five canons of rhetoric (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria and actio*), we can easily understand how each of them contributes to the improvement of linguistic skills and the production of effective messages. It is *inventio* that engages students to express linguistically new, alternative, innovative ideas, arguments and judgments in oral or written speech. *Dispositio* concerns the organic composition of the parts of speech in a solid body text. *Elocutio* deals with the choice of the appropriate words and the prepositional articulation of the message. It is directly related to the *style* of speech and it is achieved through the decoration of speech (*ornatus*) with various *figures of speech*. The correct grammatical address of speech (*latinitas*) and the insightful knowledge of the topic (*perspicuitas*) are equally important to the successful achievement of lexis (*elocutio*). *Memoria* (memory) contributes to the preservation of the invented, structured and artistically produced speech until its delivery (*actio*) to the audience either orally or in written form.

In the case of the oral delivery of the speech, rhetoric is related to the pedagogy of public speaking. The phonetics of expression and para-linguistics elements, such as facial expressions and gestures which accompany the performance of speech [14], shouldn’t be ignored. This was the main message of Demosthenes, when he equated rhetoric to *hypokrisis / ὑπόκρισις* [in Greek] or in other words the “powers of performance” of a speech (*dynamis/δύναμις*) [in Greek] [15]. Acquiring the skill of speaking in public is necessary for everyone who wants to succeed in his relationships with other persons in personal and professional life, to be involved in public issues, to pursue activities and causes that may influence his individual and collective life [16]. But, mainly, the pedagogy of public speech is important to the formation of rhetorical educators, who, through their speech in classroom, achieve all the three ciceronian functions of rhetoric: to *teach*, to *persuade* their students for the value of the new knowledge and at the same time to *delight* them during the teaching and learning process in order to achieve the transfer, the acquisition as well as the construction of the new knowledge more effectively [17].

We may, also, assume that rhetoric is pedagogical for another important reason: its epistemic nature which contributes not only to the transmission of knowledge, but, mainly, to its construction “through discourse” [18] in every cognitive field [19]. The essential characteristics of this kind of knowledge are “probability” and “situatedness” [20] which call for further evidential elements that render it valid and credible. It was Robert Scott (1967), who substituted the “prior and enabling



truth as the epistemological basis for rhetoric” [21] with the assumption that “rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating it” [22]. Such an epistemic nature of rhetoric consists of the source from which derive qualities as creativity, imagination and renovation of the old and tested.

Also, for Aristotle rhetoric is equated to the search “for all the available means of persuasion” [23]. In other words, it is connected to heuristics and to *inventive* pedagogy [24]. Independently of the strategies, patterns, topics, questions which are used, the main goal of the rhetorical invention is the discovery of new insights and understandings of trivial issues, activities, opinions, arguments. That means that the pedagogical character of rhetoric is related to changes and brand-new beginnings in life as well as in science. For achieving this goal, the cognitive dissonance or conflict is necessary for energizing genuine reflection and research.

As we all know, the cognitive conflict always stems from the clash among various ideas, opinions, arguments, voices. In other words, the cognitive dissonance results from the process of a dialogue, as it is represented, for example by the free exchange of arguments, opinions or ideas during a debate. As a consequence, we could support that rhetoric consists of a dialogic pedagogy [25].

Furthermore, if we accept that dialogue represents the major evidence of polyphony, then it would be easy to conclude that rhetoric, through dialogue, is inextricably related to the *democratic* and *emancipatory* pedagogy. As such, rhetoric, throughout the dialogic process creates a community of equal participants, who try to construct and share with the others their ideals and their truth based on values such as justice, equity, tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of opinions. In such a classroom the voice of the teacher is not anymore the authoritative one, but students have the right to co-construct the teaching and learning reality that they desire. In a dialogic classroom, both teachers and students are involved in a common journey of exchanging various beliefs and for discovering the causes that hold them, in order to uncover each other and to uncover the world through the word [26].

Additionally, through the dialogic interaction many advantages derive for all the participants. Besides the tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of opinions, the participants compose the whole picture of an issue, a “multi-perspective form of knowledge” [27], since dialogue permits the accurate investigation of the relationships of power and values which are interwoven to the process itself.

For example, Protagoras’ *dittoi logoi* or debate has always been, among others, a dialogic form which intended to conduce students, through their active participation, to the state of *aporia* or doubt about all the examined issues. For Protagoras, students’ exposure to multiple views, in order to choose, by themselves, the most appropriate at the moment, consists of an essential characteristic of a wise man who applies *euboulia* (εὐβουλία) [in Greek], that is the skill of reflecting, deciding and acting effectively at each situation. In other words, rhetorical *paideia*, through debate, reflects the character of an *active pedagogy and learning* [28], which renders students capable of participating dynamically to the resolution of real life’s problems.

The approach to real life through the exchange of opposite arguments requests the mutually critical judgement of the proposed ideas. As a result, existing cultural, economic, political and social practices pass a critical test of endurance in order either to be maintained or to be exchanged



by new ones which intend to provoke social changes. So, in terms of critical pedagogy, rhetorical paideia, through the exchange of arguments, may transform pedagogical practice to political praxis [29].

The main reasons which justify the pedagogical nature of rhetoric were presented up to this point. The pre-mentioned belief is also supported by Isocrates who, first, highlighted that rhetoric is deeply pedagogical in nature and in nurture [30]. There are likely more reasons not listed here. Independently of the number of reasons, the above theoretical review has affirmed why, still, in our days “the introduction of the term *ρητορική* (rhetoric) signals a revolution of sorts in the way discourse education was thought about” [31]. Consequently, the rest of the paper will examine modern uses of rhetorical paideia in classroom and its results at praxis level.

The pedagogical implementation of rhetoric

The second part of the paper intends to show how rhetoric may be re-introduced in classroom, penetrate the curriculum and help students develop their literacy through the enhancement of their orality skills and, as a consequence, of their writing skills [32], through the examination of already existing practices world-widely. The process may start from elementary school level and be continued throughout all school levels as well as in one’s overall academic life.

Let’s imagine a rhetorical itinerary which conduces students to progressively develop their oral communication and argumentative skills. The first stop on the itinerary concerns students’ *interpretive reading*. For Quintilian, reading consists of an inextricable part of rhetoric as it promotes eloquence, the love of letters and the students’ acquaintance with “what is morally excellent” [33]. He mentions, that its value is not limited “to one’s schooldays, but ends only with life” [34]. Although it is a common topic that reading consists of a common practice in classroom, it would be purposeful to think if, indeed, modern educators, firstly, provide students with enough time in order to enjoy the process of reading and, secondly, if they affront the process of reading with the importance that it deserves. For example, scholars notice that students in classrooms don’t easily understand what they read and that a great majority of them has significant difficulties in reading comprehension at all school levels [35]. It could be supported that reading has become a mechanistic process in classroom which is confined to a monotonous recognition of written printed symbols on the paper.

On the contrary, reading as process can be vivified in classroom, if educators follow Quintilian’s teachings. The great rhetorician combined reading with the teaching of qualities which are characteristic of public speaking. For example, he refers to the necessity of teaching readers the taking of correct breaths, the use of pauses, the alterations of voice, speed, intonation according to the sense of a text [36].

Probably, the above suggestions make part of a long tradition of reading aloud interwoven with another major communicative skill such as active listening. For example, the ancient Sumerian scripts were considered symbols, destined to transmit sounds through their reading. The aforementioned perception of reading was common until the 10th century A.C., when the practice of silent reading began to become dominant [37].

But even then, during the elocution movement which evolved in the 18th century, Sheridan, the Irish actor and major supporter of the elocution movement, discerned elocution (reading aloud)



from silent reading. He fervently supported the idea that reading aloud permits both “the universalizing power of text with the personalized ideal of energetic speech which must be accessible to a general audience” [38]. For Sheridan, the reading of a text becomes a means through which the reader transmits both the ideas and the sentiments of the author in a unique mode due to its performance. Also, it becomes an “art of interpretation” [39] of the text as well as the first step to developing communication skills through persuasive reading.

Such ideas may, still, be useful in classroom, especially in the teaching of language arts, since they familiarize students with excellent texts extracted from major national or universal literature. In this way, the interpretive reading experience permits the acquisition of new knowledge, its maintenance as well as its sharing with the audience. At the same time, for many students, the interpretive reading transforms a non-sense and monotonous process as reading in classroom to a living communication experience.

The second stop of the rhetorical itinerary might be the practice of students, even those in elementary school (students 10 to 12 years old in Greek elementary schools), in impromptu speaking. It is a speech given without preparation on an unknown issue [40]. As a form of “spontaneous” speech [41], despite its difficulty, it allows students to develop both their vertical / analytical as well as literal thinking [42]. Indeed, students are asked to present one to two minutes speech in order to explain their point, to compare, to describe, to define a notion or an incomplete sentence or to share a quote etc. Usually, students are given thirty seconds time for preparation of their impromptu speech. As it becomes obvious, this exercise tends to enhance the flexibility and speed of thought, while at the same time students cultivate their organizational textual skills. The produced oral text must satisfy the textual relations of cohesion and coherence. Equally, creativity and imagination play an important role to the successful delivery of an impromptu speech. The original ideas are necessary in order to renew stereotypical modes of thinking about various issues. For achieving such a goal the metaphorical use of topics (e.g. analogy) may be related to the invention of original ideas [43].

At the same time, the delivery of impromptu speech is rather important. The articulation, the voice of the students, their gestures, facial expressions are necessary elements of the communication of their messages. Besides the Language Arts lesson, all the teaching objects of the curriculum (such as the sciences, history etc.) may become sources of impromptu speech topics. In this way, students may feel free to express their knowledge about the world and to share their experiences with others.

The production of an exhortative speech consists of the third stop on the itinerary. This type of speech may, mainly, be addressed to students of high school in the form of a short speech (approximately between four to six minutes), while for younger students the sense of exhortation may be understood through the production of exhortative arguments in the context of dramatization of a dialogue (e.g. between a seller and a client). In the case of the exhortative speech, the student-speaker aims to persuade the audience to accept or not a certain proposed thesis taking into consideration all the elements that compose the notion of *Kairos* (time, space, the audience, the issue etc.) and, consequently, the use of the appropriate arguments [44], while the context of the exhortative speech must be clearly defined (e.g. *Smile. It is contagious*). Also, the main thesis of the speaker must be supported with logical, well organized arguments and evidence. As regards



the arrangement of the parts of the speech, introduction and epilogue play a very important role. Furthermore, the choice of the appropriate vocabulary is of vital importance for a successful delivery. The chosen words must be vivid and direct, while rhetorical questions, figures of speech as repetitions and exhortations increase the credibility of the speaker. The delivery of the speech comes to the foreground as well. The crystal articulation of spoken words, the appropriate volume of the voice according to the content, the movement in the space, the gestures of the speaker, the eye contact with the audience are evaluated as important elements of a successful performance. In contrast to the impromptu speech, students are given time in order to prepare this kind of speech (e.g. twenty minutes before its delivery), as the practice in rhetorical contests in various private and public Greek Lyceums reveals [45].

The last and most important stop of the rhetorical itinerary is the one of argumentation activities. Argumentation, by its nature, presupposes another speaker as recipient of the produced arguments and, at the same time, as sender of counter-arguments. Besides preliminary linguistic games and various forms of debates (e.g. fishbowl debate, four corners debate etc.) which familiarize students to the production of arguments and counter-arguments [46], parliamentary forms of *debate* highlight the argumentative process.

Protagoras, as father of *dittoi logoi*, intended, from a philosophical point of view, to make his students comprehend and express the relativity of human knowledge, since “man is the measure of all things”. At the same time, for the first time in human history, debates expressed the right of doubt of the transmitted truths and the right to free thinking and talking. The main goal of Protagoras was to train students’ judgement in order to manage and negotiate more efficiently both individual and collective issues [47]. Plato [48] was opposite to this practice, because, implicitly, he was afraid of accepting that due to it, everybody might acquire the privilege to participate in the formation of politics. On the contrary, Cicero [49], following the line of Protagoras, considered debate a useful pedagogical practice. In particular, he supported the idea that debate, as a reasonable and co-operative process, is challenging citizens to reason deeper on important issues and to become engaged to the best solutions and actions for the state.

How can debate be examined in modern terms of pedagogy? Besides the training of active listening, through debate students learn to evaluate the validity of the proposed evidence by discerning inaccuracies or fallacies to the participants’ argumentation due to their prior cognitive structures. Thus, the model of cognitive apprenticeship is applied while empathy is cultivated, since it becomes obvious that there are at least two different approaches to each subject [50]. In other words, debate conduces students to the limitation of egocentric thinking, the acceptance of diverse opinions and polyphony on the same topic, the rejection of dogmatism, the research of alternative ideas, the empowerment of their view of the world and of various social issues [51]. At the same, sociocultural practices as respectful negotiation in a democratic context are developed. In more, debate improves the comprehension of various textual forms, which either take the form of written texts of information during the preparation phase of the students or appear as oral textual products throughout the debate.

Debates allow students to examine various topics of evaluative or hypothetical content, encourage the alternative approach of such topics leading them to a more accurate, correct and functional use of grammar and syntax structures as well as to the use of a richer and more



appropriate vocabulary. Also, they are correlated to the improvement of written argumentation [52] and to the acquisition of more deep knowledge in various fields as history or sciences. Finally, debates in classroom or/and in after school clubs of rhetoric for students contribute to the cultivation of critical thinking [53] either in the form of an academic contest [54] or in the form of constructive controversies where the aim is the finding of a creative and acceptable solution [55]. It becomes obvious that critical thinking, as the “reflective and reasonable thinking” which leads to the decision taking and the acceptance or not of various propositions [56] is cultivated because of the active cognitive evaluation of the provided information.

To sum up, the familiarization to debate, despite its demanding character, is one of the most important factors for bringing students’ academic completion [57]. So, high schools and academic departments as well as elementary schools [58] could become places of implementation of such purposeful and fruitful activities. In this way, students would, progressively, learn the basic notions of argument, counter -argument, rebuttal through various, simple linguistic games and would apply techniques that render the attempt more agreeable and easier for them.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper intended to explain why rhetoric still consists of a major pedagogy in the modern era in forming responsible and reflective individuals and citizens. Also, it was shown how rhetoric can be re-introduced to classrooms in order to cultivate students’ orality, according to educational tendencies which are noticed world-widely and in Greek high schools and elementary schools as well.

All the pre-mentioned linguistic activities may be applied either in a classroom setting, in students’ rhetorical clubs or in rhetorical contests among students of the same school or among various schools. In general, such activities echo the influence of ancient *progymnasmata*, the well-known system of preliminary exercises which progressively trained students in the delivery of rhetorical assignments “that steadily grew in length and degree of difficulty” [59].

The implementation of analogous rhetorical activities in contemporary classrooms by the educators is important, if there is genuine interest to cultivate students’ orality by motivating them to talk about various issues of modern reality and of their lives. The positive results that such activities bring about, become obvious in short time both at individual and collective level, if there is consistency and method in their implementation by the educators.

More specifically, interpretive reading, impromptu and exhortative speech cultivate individual qualities of each student as regards the delivery of a speech through the personal improvement of language skills and body language skills. Additionally, students who get familiarized with argumentative dialogues, various forms of argumentative discussions and debates acquire not only complex communication but co-operation skills as well. In this way, students are wholly energized and at the same time problematized in order to think and talk about various, taken-for-granted personal, social, political and/or scientific issues. In this way, students become more conscious of themselves and of the world succeeding the ideals of humanistic *paideia* and attaching rhetoric to a new, universal perspective of lifelong learning.

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