

PURPOSE INSPIRED DIALOGUES: USING THE SOCIAL MEDIA TO TEACH YOUTH ABOUT SENSE OF MEANING AND PURPOSE

PROPÓSITO INSPIRADO EM DIÁLOGO: USANDO A MÍDIA SOCIAL PARA ENSINAR OS JOVENS ACERCA DO SENTIDO E PROPÓSITO DA VIDA

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Resumo. O objetivo deste estudo é compartilhar algumas das maneiras inovadoras que podemos usar para ensinar as pessoas, especialmente os jovens, sobre a filosofia de encontrar significado e propósito na vida (logoteoria) de Viktor Frankl, refletindo sobre as experiências cotidianas em um diálogo. A fim de concretizar este processo, uma plataforma foi criada em mídias sociais para dar aos jovens a oportunidade de partilhar as suas perspectivas e experiências sobre questões relacionadas com o senso de significado e propósito. Foi a partir dos diálogos, apresentada na mídia social, que, o termo “Diálogos Franklianos” foi cunhado.

Palavras-chave: Diálogos; mídias sociais; significado

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to share some of the innovative ways we can use to teach the people, especially youth, about Viktor Frankl’s philosophy of finding meaning and purpose in life (logo-theory) reflecting on everyday experiences in a dialogue. In order to actualise this process, a platform was created on social media to give youth an opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences about issues related to sense of meaning and purpose. It was from the dialogues, presented on the social media, that, the term ‘Franklian Dialogues’ was coined.

Keywords: Dialogues; social media; meaning

This paper discusses a project in which a platform was created on social media to give people an opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences about issues related to a sense of meaning and purpose. From the dialogues presented on the social media, I coined the term “Franklian Dialogues.”

DIALOGUE

A dialogue is a dramatic and exciting technique comprised of a written or spoken casual conversation between two or more people. *Dia* is an ancient Greek preposition that means through or across. Its main historical origins as a narrative, theoretical, or educational tool are in classical Greek and Indian literature, especially in the ancient art of public speaking (Brickhouse, & Smith, 2004; Maranhão, 1990). The word dialogue is made up of the two words *dia* and *logos*, which can be understood as the two-way flow/discussion of meaning.

A dialogue impacts a discussion and increases understanding of different points of view and to shape the limitless possibilities (Dialogue. (n.d.); Socratic method. (n.d.)). As a result, a dialogue facilitates innovative ways through which change can be achieved.

Today, dialogue is used in social media, classrooms, community centers, corporations, federal agencies, and other settings to make it possible for people, usually in small groups, to share their perspectives and experiences about complex issues (Dialogue. (n.d.)). It is used to help people to come to terms with long-standing conflicts and to create a deeper understanding of contentious issues. The purpose of a dialogue is

to understand and learn, not to judge, weigh, or make decisions. Dialogue dismisses stereotypes, builds trust, and makes it possible for people to be open to different views.

VIKTOR FRANKL AND THE USE OF DIALOGUES

As indicated earlier, the principle of dialogue originates from the times of the ancient Greeks; however, what is mentioned by Socratic Dialogue in our current times is something different. A dialogue is a fundamental method in helping professions; and its goal is to modify or change attitudes.

It is important that we should look at how Viktor Frankl used “Socrates” and “Socratic dialogue”. In his writing, Frankl does repeatedly mention Socrates in connection with his dialogues with patients. For example, in *The Doctor and the Soul* he mentions that, “the climacteric crisis had to be reshaped into a spiritual rebirth—that, in this case, was the task of logotherapy. The therapist took the part of a midwife in the Socratic sense.” (Frankl, 1967, p.185). In the same book, Frankl uses the term “Socratic dialogue” when he says, “The young doctor’s chat with the woman, couched rather in the style of a Socratic dialogue, did not fail to take effect.” (Frankl, 1967, p.185). In another example Frankl uses the word “Socratic” to refer to his communication with a patient (Frankl, 1967). However, Frankl does not directly mention the Socratic Dialogue as a therapeutic technique per se but as a process to be used in modification of attitudes.

Joseph Fabry who was student of Frankl

devoted an entire chapter to Socratic Dialogue in one of his books (Fabry, 1988). Fabry wrote:

The Socratic dialogue is the tool that the helper uses most frequently to aid the seeker in the search for meaning. This dialogue brings you in touch with your healthy core, the spirit, so that you can use its resources. One of the basic assumptions of logotherapy is that, in the depth of your spiritual dimension, you know what kind of person you are, what your potentials are, what is important and meaningful to you. Socrates believed that it was the task of the teacher, not to pour information into the students, but rather to elicit from the students what they know intuitively. (Fabry, 1988, p.9).

In line with what Fabry mentioned, Frankl mention that, “it is the task of the logotherapist, not to tell seekers what the meanings in their lives are, but rather to elicit the wisdom that is hidden within the spirit of each seeker.” (Frankl, 1978, p.32).

In line with what Frankl said, by sharing my experiences on the social media, I am not instructing the audience on what they should do; but, instead I use my experiences as a way to tap into their spiritual resources and elicit what they know intuitively.

WHY FRANKLIAN DIALOGUES?

In a therapeutic as well as a philosophical sense, logotherapy, is more of a mindset than a set of technique/s. As a result logotherapists are more or less free in choosing which technique to apply

as long as they stand firmly on the foundations of logotherapy (logo'theory' or logo'philosophy'), because the technique has to individually fit the patient. Frankl also emphasizes that, “what matters is never technique per se but rather the spirit in which the technique is used. This holds not only for drugs and electroshocks, but for Freudian psychoanalysis, for Adlerian psychology, and for logotherapy as well.” (Frankl, 1988, pp.28-29). As a result logotherapists have to tailor their approach to fit the patient. It is from this premise that the social media also present a wonderful opportunity to create Franklian Dialogues.

As indicated earlier on, a lot of other therapeutic 'schools' also use Socratic dialogue as one of their techniques. Consequently I will be careful to present an argument that a Socratic Dialogue is purely a logotherapeutic method. Nonetheless, there is a solid consensus among logotherapists to recognize the use of Socratic dialogue as an appropriate technique. However, there also seems to be agreement that because this method is not well defined, it is mostly presented as an ancillary. Socratic Dialogue is more a method to modify attitudes and behavior; and it is widely applicable to a wide variety of specific interventions, unlike paradoxical intention and dereflection which are specific to logotherapy.

Due to the fact that the term Socratic Dialogue is too broad to distinguish its use in logotherapy and as well as in other forms of therapy, I coined the phrase “Franklian Dialogue” to define a separate interaction method that could be used in the logotherapeutic helping professions. In this way one is creating a platform to define Frankl's version of Socratic

dialogue; which, in a way, will help to improve its significance. However, I will be careful to call the “Franklian Dialogue” a logotherapeutic technique as it is more a process to raise people’s conscience about purposeful living.

Frankl frequently mentioned that each person must live logotherapy uniquely to find a unique approach to help each person. For this cause. “Franklian dialogue” is not a process which can be directly “lectured”, but something a person develops in time from an awareness of the spiritual dimension(s), and from understanding the “call to meaning” that is uniquely expressed through each person. The Franklian Dialogue, then, is not a technique as much as it is a position, taken from the point of view of the spiritual dimension. Perhaps we should elaborate further on this point, by asking the following question, can a dialogue be considered technique?” First we should note that, in undertaking any form of psychotherapy, most of the time is spent in purposeful dialogue and only a limited amount of time spent engaged in formal technique (e.g. to induce relaxation, role play, etc). Longer techniques, such as systematic desensitization, arise as a result of a dialogue.

So, to the extent that Franklian Dialogue seeks to make the unconscious conscious, and, to the extent that logotherapists use it to allow clients to become conscious of his or her freedom and responsibility (i.e., the spiritual unconscious); (Frankl, 1967; Frankl, 1978; Frankl, 1985; Frankl, 1988). then dialogue could be considered central-but not, as technique, but rather, central in the sense that dialogue is central to psychotherapy in general. It is for this reason that psychotherapy is called the “talking cure”.

Logically, then, just as logotherapy goes beyond psychotherapy, Franklian Dialogue or logotherapeutic dialogue surpasses other psychotherapeutic dialogue simply by virtue of its recognition of the spiritual dimension. For this reason Franklian Dialogues will be more appropriate for people who have crises of spiritual awakening as opposed to those who require psychotherapy. Thus one is not conducting therapy over the social media, but, assisting the audience to be aware of the defiant power of the human spirit.

I would like to emphasize that referring to these dialogues as “Franklian Dialogue” is less about 'gurufication' and more about crediting Frankl with the process. Consequently, we use the term “Franklian Psychology” to refer to his theory. As a result, a “Franklian Dialogue” is a subset of Socratic Dialogue which more accurately describes the intent of the dialogue- to help individuals “birth” or bring forth the meaning or purpose they are seeking. This term is used these to describe a specifically logotherapeutic “process” whereby the logotherapist as a “guider” takes on a stance of “not being a know all”. For this reason, in order to help the audience to cope with their existential questions and struggles I did not provide them with ready-made, ultimate or set answers but I shared my experiences which were adapted to a Frankl consciousness - with the goal of “midwifing” the audience’s own answers. In this way I did not act as the expert providing answers but a fellow human being in search of meaning helping another human being discover meaningful answers to the questions life poses.

APPLYING FRANKLIAN DIALOGUES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The Franklian Dialogues are used to demonstrate how to apply logotherapy on the social media. The Franklian Dialogues are adapted from the famous Socratic Dialogues that depict Socrates involved in the process of posing questions to his fellow citizens about social and epistemological issues (Brickhouse, & Smith, 2004; Socrates. (n.d.); Socratic Method. (n.d.)). In the same way, Franklian Dialogues are dialogues wherein individuals discuss social and philosophical problems, explaining a variety of logotherapeutic principles.

In this paper the dialogues include the exact words of each participant (translated into English where needed) along with the description of the backgrounds of the dialogue, as well as exemplary quotes from Viktor Frankl. As a result, for purposes of this paper the term Franklian Dialogues is defined as a form of Socratic Dialogue in which the principles of Viktor Frankl's teachings are used to generate discussions with an audience. For this reason, the social media created a fantastic platform for beginning such dialogues.

In order to create the Franklian Dialogues, I took some of my experiences and adjusted them to meaning realization with the goal of creating an opportunity for the audience to modify their thinking to the meaning focus as well, as a way of teaching Viktor Frankl's perspective. To do this, I started with regular dialogues about issues from my past and present experiences, which in turn became the beginning of the Franklian Dialogues.

There are a number of issues in my background experience that were addressed by the philosophy of Viktor Frankl. These are the issues that I share with the audience to help them to understand logotherapy better. Throughout my life I had placed much emphasis on my horizontal development (i.e., on a continuum from failure to success), (Frankl, 1988) and I attained much progress in this regard. However, through the Franklian Dialogues I attempted to create an opportunity for a vertical movement (i.e., from despair to fulfillment).

I reflected on different facets of my life: family, work, attitudes, social, spiritual, as well as self-transcendence issues. In this way, I showed that meaning cuts across all circumstances. Therefore, I exercised my thoughts on various issues, past, present, and future.

I shared with the audience some of the ways we can change to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. I presented the term "pimp the pain." To "pimp" in this case is to get the most out of a situation. Those who are familiar with television programs such as *Pimp My Ride* will understand why I chose this name. In that program, viewers with old and battered cars write letters to the producers of the show requesting that they be assisted to fix their cars into something new. A car is selected for each episode and revamped with the latest technology; in other words, it is the same old car transformed into a new one. Following the principles of logotherapy which teach us that we are all capable of finding meaning in suffering, the concept "pimpdapain" is a slang word that means "to get the best out of the worst situations and conditions" or simply "finding meaning in the midst of suffering."

HOW PURPOSE INSPIRED DIALOGUES ARE FORMATTED

The outline of each Dialogue is as follows:

- The dialogue (From the Social Media)
- Contribution of Participants (from the Social Media), and
- Frankl quote

A short synopsis of some of the themes that emanate from each dialogue, These themes center on one (or more) of the five areas that assist the seeker to discover meaning in each value, i.e., choice, self-discovery, responsibility, self-transcendence, and uniqueness (Fabry, 1988).

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

Solomon Oupa Makola –

I finished redesigning my garden; but one problem remained; there is a municipal sewage hole in the middle of the lawn. At first I planted grass over it; I was told it is illegal and anyway suppose there's a problem they will dig all over my garden looking for it. I was disappointed; but then I came up with the idea of removing the grass and put a bird-bath over it. I'm so happy and so is the rest of my family. Birds are enjoying a fresh bath on the sculpture while dirt is passing underneath. In the same way, problems will forever be part of our lives, but we can come up with creative ways to redecorate them for our benefit and those of others. Sense of meaning is one of the tools we can use to "PIMP DA PAIN" (pimp the pain) in our lives. Each time I look at the bird-bath I will be reminded of how

important it is to redecorate my problem. So, come on lets "PIMP DA PAIN" guys and girls.

Participant 1 You made me realise something about life...That when one has a problem you must learn to live with it so that you can beat it. It is not always possible for one to get problems to disappear...Thanks, you made my day; in fact you inspired my whole Life...

Participant 2 Wow...So creative Dr..Nice Bird bath. Problems will always be part of life but what matters is how we deal with them. As you said before, redecorate them. Thank you very Dr

Participant 3 it is a good idea to do something as family because you will take care of it.

Solomon Oupa Makola (Response to **Participant 1**). Wow! Thank you very much for sharing that sound interpretation. You are right; my wife was in tears and my 5 year daughter was concerned that we cannot let the birds drink on an empty stomach, we should also provide food for them.

Participant 4 I never thought you might come up with such a good statement like this when I was busy reading. I think I understand you.

Participant 5 Yeah! Let's do this!!!!.....
Enjoy

Solomon Oupa Makola (Reply to **Participant 4**) That is my new trademark. So instead of saying, "find meaning to your suffering", I will simply say *pimp the pain* .

Participant 6 Nice one, I love it.

Participant 7 Hmmm!. Bishop Noel Jones talks about "creating a situation for revelation" I think that is you! You always full of

tools for building God's people. Good day coach
Participant 8 Yes! You right Dr We have to learn how to modify our problems and troubles into solutions, wealth and fortune. Way to go. Let us pimp it.

Solomon Oupa Makola Yep! We should get the best out of our pain. So, each day one of our goals should be to find meaning in suffering, to pimp the pain.

Viktor E. Frankl – “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” (Frankl, 1985)

Synopsis: The most important theme which emerged from this dialogue is the one of uniqueness. Every situation presents unique opportunities which enable us to discover meaning in it. These unique opportunities may sometimes arise in the form of oppositions. In the above dialogue, the municipal sewage hole seemed to be an opposition to my creative potentials, however it also compelled me to search for a solutions which would accommodate both myself and the municipality.

CLOSING REMARKS

Meaning has an important function in our lives. In the first instance, it provides values or standards for judging our lives. Secondly, it gives us a sense of control over the events in our lives. Finally, it gives us a sense of self-worth (Das, 1998). When we cannot find meaning or lose meaning, we become distressed. Many emotional

problems result from lack of meaning in life and can be resolved through finding something to make life worth living. Part of the reason I started the dialogues on social media, which eventually resulted in the Franklian Dialogues, was to teach my audience some of the ways they can discover meaning in their lives by reflecting on personal experiences.

Judging by general comments the author received from the participants, on his social media webpage, it was evident that they benefited from the exercise. Some became involved in stating their own meaningful stories; and every time they posted something on their social media webpage, they would alert the author by linking their stories to his social media account. In general, the comments they made in their personal stories suggest that this process resulted in personal insights. The author could also notice, from the participants' comments that their perspectives changed. The current dialogues took place in a natural setting, and participants partook haphazardly. To improve the method the researcher would like to call for research of the process where participants will be purposefully sampled, and a psychometric test, such as the Purpose in Life test (PIL), will be used at the start and end for each participant. In this way the researcher will be able to determine whether the intervention had an impact on personal insights. Such a study could also include both an experimental and a controlled delay group for evaluation in a university setting.

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