

# The Instrument of Discursive Analysis: a heuristic tool supporting the educational community

Luigina Mortari, Migena Rexha & Iliaria Berardi

Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona (Italy)

luigina.mortari@univr.it | migena.rexha@univr.it | ilaria.berardi@univr.it

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational contexts are becoming increasingly complex due to growing social and technological challenges (Gadotti, 2002; UNESCO, 2019) and are characterized by individualistic behaviors and confrontational language (Mortari, 2025). Faced with this complexity, schools and teachers are asked to cultivate educational practices aimed at promoting dialogue and social responsibility (Mortari, 2003; Wenger, 2006), since school education is not only a formative practice but also a transformative one (Wenger, 2006).

Teacher Education concerns not only the acquisition of didactic skills but also the development of reflective, interpretive, and dialogic abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dewey, 2011), oriented toward situated practices and critical reflection (Schön, 2006), in which language and dialogic interaction play a central role (Mortari, 2003; Wenger, 2006).

From this perspective, discursive practices serve as ways for teachers to construct meaning, mediate interpretations, and develop professional awareness (Mortari et al., 2021). It is therefore essential to provide teachers with a practical tool for analyzing discursive practices, capable of making conversational moves in the classroom visible and supporting the development of a more reflective and dialogically aware teaching profession (Mortari et al., 2021).

**This paper aims to highlight the Instrument of Discursive Analysis in support of teacher education.**

## METHOD & INSTRUMENT OF ANALYSIS

The IDA is a heuristic instrument of qualitative analysis aimed at identifying the typologies of communicative intention that each speaker communicates during dialogic exchange (Mortari, 2014; Vannini, 2020). This instrument makes it possible to generate the discursive profile of both the teacher and the students during conversation (Mortari & Silva, 2018).

The instrument pursues a dual aims (Mortari & Silva, 2018):

- Heuristic: it aims to produce a rigorous understanding of how participants engage in dialogue with one another.
- Educational: it returns to participants an analytical representation of their own conversational profile, enabling them to critically examine its quality in relation to the objectives pursued in the dialogue.

The present contribution relocates the IDA within the formulation of the Empirical Phenomenological Method (Mortari, 2022; Mortari et al., 2023), enabling the search for the concrete essence of each discursive act.

### PRE ANALYSIS

Record a dialogue on a specific concept in class that involves the entire class.

Transcribe the classroom dialogue faithfully and organize the transcribed material into a table divided into five columns.

N.	Speaker	Verbal exchange	Conversational moves of Teacher	Conversational moves of Students

### ANALYSIS

Familiarise yourself with the material to be analysed by repeatedly reading the transcription of the dialogue (Mortari, 2002; Mortari & Silva, 2018).

Consider each verbal exchange as a meaningful unit, which may be broken down into multiple conversational moves.

Define the concrete essence of each conversational move (Mortari et al., 2023), that is, identify a descriptive label that captures the specific discursive quality of each conversational move made by the teacher and the students. At this stage, validated discursive act codings from the scientific research literature may be used as a critical horizon of comparison for the formulation of categories.

Create two lists of the corresponding labels: one comprising the conversational moves implemented by the teacher, and the other comprising the conversational moves implemented by the students.

Verify that each label faithfully captures the essence of the discursive intention of each conversational move, returning recursively to the data.

Construct a set of analogous data, that is, group all descriptive labels that share similar qualities into distinct clusters.

Formulate the first level of extended essences, that is, identify a conceptual category that represents each distinct cluster. Each category — representing a specific discursive act — will consist of a set of descriptive labels — representing the conversational moves — and the numerical frequency with which these emerged during the dialogue. At this stage, validated discursive act codings from the scientific research literature may be used as a critical horizon of comparison for the formulation of categories.

Construct a hierarchy of essences for the development of the definitive coding system.

Create the final coding system consisting of the conceptual categories and their respective labels.

### POST ANALYSIS

Review the conversational profile of the teacher and the students, and observe what emerges critically and constructively, with the aim of progressively improving discursive practices in the classroom.

## AN EXAMPLE OF THE IDA: THE CODING SYSTEM

Analysis of three Socratic Conversations at primary school, involving a researcher, who acted as a facilitator of the dialogue, and 24 children (aged 6 to 7 years).

Discursive acts	Conversational moves	Teacher	Children	
Assertive acts	To declare agreement	1	2	
	To declare knowing	1	1	
	To declare not knowing	/	4	
	To declare willingness to collaborate	/	1	
	To declare understanding	6	/	
	To declare a lack of understanding	2	/	
Co-constructive acts	To mirror	57	/	
	To invite to collaborate	2	/	
	To add meaning to the other's thought	/	8	
	To recall another's thought	3	/	
	To complete another's speech	/	1	
	To rephrase the interlocutor's thought	18	/	
	To synthesize emerging thoughts	4	/	
	To seek agreement	3	/	
	Regulative acts	To direct attention to the concept to be questioned	4	/
To shift attention to something else		/	5	
To regulate the interaction		99	2	
To regulate behaviour		14	/	
To ask to intervene		/	9	
To bring attention back to the concept to be questioned		11	/	
To draw attention to the expressed thought		1	/	
To guide the interlocutors' thinking		1	/	
To invite to continue		9	/	
To invite to speak		12	/	
Informative acts		To ask for information	7	3
		To provide information	2	15
	To ask for confirmation	6	1	
	To repeat the question	6	/	
	To correct the interlocutor's thought	2	2	
	To ask to repeat	/	3	
	To reiterate one's own thought	8	1	
	To verify possession of knowledge	2	/	
	Relational acts	To reassure	4	1
To thank		22	/	
Reflective acts	To encourage reflection	4	/	
	To reflect on emerging thoughts	3	/	
Problematizing acts	To call into question	1	/	
	To ask for clarification	12	1	
	To ask to argue	13	/	
Developmental acts	To raise a problem	5	/	
	To exemplify	1	24	
	To add meaning to one's own thought	/	6	
	To provide conceptualization	/	33	
	To provide clarification	/	9	
	To provide reasons	/	33	
	To provide interpretation	/	18	
	To provide elaboration	/	1	
	To express one's own point of view	/	13	
	To ask to explore further	2	/	
	To ask to conceptualize	16	/	
	To ask to exemplify	4	/	
	To ask to interpret	6	/	
	To ask to reflect on the experience	6	/	
Evaluative acts	To formulate judgment	19	/	
	To validate the thought	15	/	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56 typologies of conversational moves</b>	<b>414 verbal exchanges</b>	<b>197 verbal exchanges</b>	

