Communication Between Teachers and Students

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Abstract

The subject of optimizing communication relationships between teachers and students has been one of interest for both science education specialists and practitioners in education. Defined from a philosophical, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic point of view, from the perspective of social psychology and the theory of information, in terms of educational sciences or as a systemic approach, communication always incites and calls for analysis and reflection in order to identify different ways of making it more efficient. Training for the teaching profession requires the mastery of communication skills, which contribute to the development of interpersonal relationships.

Dynamic interaction between teacher and student is necessary for a successful relationship throughout the school year, and as part of it, communication skills play an important role. Starting from the most popular approaches to communication, we have outlined a list with a few rules, suggestions, recommendations that are specific to the art of interpersonal relationships that may underlie the formation and development of students' communicative competence. The conclusions we reached confirm the hypothesis that I started from and emphasizes the role of communication in the educational relationship.

Keywords: teachers, students, relationship, interaction, communication

Introduction

Communication has always been one of the main components of education. In order to achieve communication it requires a relational space which guides and holds the meaning and significance of information and generates reciprocity within human relations. The cultural universe revolves around communication, understood as the foundation of inter-subjectivity.

The phenomenon of interpersonal relations, considered as a direct, immediate psycho-social interactions between at least two people, was named in many ways and identified with human, interhuman, inter-affective relations etc. Currently, in socio-psychological literature there are various types of interpersonal relationships, classified by different criteria (nature, the direction it evolves to, the field it takes place in etc.). There are formal, informal or non-formal relations, short and long-term or permanent relations, unilateral or bi /

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multilateral relations, vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (mutual), family, work, social life relations etc.

According to the needs and demands of people, relations (ratios) are divided into: interknowledge, management, communication and affective relationships. Communication relations interfere with the other types being influenced by them and acting on them, either directly or indirectly, voluntarily or involuntarily.

The communication relation gives the educational process the value of a complex educational intervention, based on an educational language that determines inside the structure of the personality a series of cognitive, emotional, attitudinal and actional changes. Regarded as psychosocial interaction, it is involved in directing and controlling the activity of a person or group, in the mutual influence and the waiting for feedbacks (positive or negative) obtained according to specific objectives.

Communicative interactions depend on the context of communication, the nature of relations between teachers and students, the psychosocial atmosphere, the previous experience, the dynamic of the relation between status and role, the conception of the educational actors (more or less flexible or rigid). Didactic communication is, by its specifics, a predominantly verbal form of communication that reflects the qualities of the two partners (teachers and students) as well as the qualities of the school curricula. At the same time, it depends on the register of the paraverbal and nonverbal components that come to support both the formative-constructivist and modeling interaction between teacher and student.

1. The Conceptual Framework

1.1. The specifics of teaching communication in the relation between teachers and students

The philosophies of communication examine the laws governing human relations, the fundamental problem being, knowing one another. Very strongly interdisciplinarized, communication has generated a number of theories that evoke different ways and perspectives of explaining the term, the transition from monocentrism to plurality, illustrating the dynamic of perspectives. Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinary loans are useful, especially from the perspective of attenuating the fragmentation of the problem studied.

Theories on communication evoke different perspectives and ways of explaining communication: information-based theories, theories on the creation of meaning, interpersonal communication theories, group communication theories, organizational communication theories, theories on communication between generations, intercultural communication theories, theories on communication via mass-media. Each theory is associated with a

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communication model. Thus, we can talk about (Cochinescu 2008): information theories, constructivist theories, semiotic theories ant the behavioral theory.

Communication was interpreted as (Craig 1999): *the practical art of discourse* (rhetorical tradition), *intersubjective mediation of signs* (semiotics tradition), *experience of otherness* (the phenomenological tradition), *processing of information* (cyber tradition), *expression, interaction and influence* (socio-psychological tradition), *(re)production of social order* (socio-cultural tradition), *speech* (critical tradition). From an educational perspective, communication is not just a matter of knowing the other as well as it does not reduce itself to the fundamental notion of influence. It means more and can be understood from other perspectives (apud Iacob 1996): the informational perspective (*information*) - C. Shannon, W. Weaver, Cl. Flament, R. B. Zajonc etc., the interactionist perspective – S. Moscovici, B. Rimé, R. Ghiglione, C. Kerbrat-Orrecchioni (*relation*), the praxiological persective – G. Bateson, P. Watzlawich, the School in Palo Alto (*action*), the pragmatic perspective – S. Hybels, JA De Vito (transaction), the cultural perspective - ET Hall, E. Goffman (*cultural act*).

These theories can take the form of some linear models (situated on the analytical, mechanistic and technicist line) and interactionist models (focused on relationships between elements). The new communication paradigms are illustrated by the psychosociological theory (School of Palo Alto - Watzlawick, Bateson, Beavin, Jackson), communication anthropology (ethnography of communication –D. Hymes, symbolic interactionis – E. Goffman, the ethnomethodology of language – H.. Garfinkel) (apud Sălăvăstru 2004).

The main source of ideas about communication the century before, dating from ancient times, was a rhetoric one (Littlejohn 1996). We can see that recently the area of interpretation has widened and the idea of "social co-construction" is emphasizing based on dynamic interaction where the degree of inter-subjectivity (for example) is analyzed in relation to the psycho-individual and socio-cultural determinations equally. Lohisse J. (2002) argues that relational and interactional processes are the essence of communication and the researchers at Palo Alto reached rigorous scientific conclusions on the implementation of the system in human sciences. They (anthropologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, linguists etc.) borrowed concepts and models from the systemic approach, linguistics and logic, trying to explain an overview of interaction. Social interactions are seen, such as acts of communication.

Etymologically, the word "communication" comes from the Latin *communius* (common) that formed the verb *communico* (doing jointly, participate in maintaning of what is common). "Communicate" means "being with" "sharing and sharing yourself", "achieving a communion of thought, feeling and action", "building a reality with others by using a system of signs and a mutually acceptable set of principles that makes the exchange possible"(Ghiglione 1986; Abric 2002). As a continuous, irreversible and

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inevitable process that takes place at several levels (ex. infomational, relational), communication uses both the digital and analog way, assuming adjustment and adaptation processes. It appears that there are many partly overlapping areas which assign communication its meaning (apud Cuilenburg, et al. 1998): announcement, bringing to attention; verbal contacts within a group or team; presentation or occasion which fosters the exchange of ideas or spiritual relations.

The way we see the world is influenced by our previous experiences so that people of different ages, nationalities, cultures, types of education, occupations, gender and temperament will have different perceptions and will receive situations differently (Stanton 1995). Therefore, we consider *the integrated theory of communication* to be relevant, proposed by A. Mucchielli who considers the science of communication as a general theory of human action.

As a form of educational communication, *didactic communication* is "the instrumental communication, directly involved in supporting a systematic process of learning" (Iacob 1998). Characterized by conviction and persuasion, it involves the rational dimension of personality. As a form of influence, beliefs guide wishes and shape actions (Peirce 1990), while persuasion (regarding attitudes and behaviors) is associated with an idea that only imposes to one individual or a small group, by reason of individual determination.

Accompanying the conviction, persuasion transmits emotion, experience, enthusiasm and aims to change the attitudes and beliefs of the other in a given direction (usually favorable to the one who initiated the persuasive speech). Communication skills (*Communication Functions Questionaire - CFQ*) were examined in interpersonal relations: skills that focus on the management of affects and emotions (consolation skills - when others are in need and ego supportive skills – stimulating the feelings of others about him or her), referential skills (the ability to present information in a clear and understandable manner), conversational skills (addressing some problems in occasional situations), narrative skills (telling jokes and stories) persuasive skills (of influencing others in changing their behavior), conflict management skills (solving problems effectively) and skills of application and abidance by regulation (helping someone in fixing and correcting an error), verbal and nonverbal speed (apud Burleson and Samter 1990; Frymier and Houser 2000).
The studies focused on instructional communication analyzed some variables synthetically captured by AB Frymier and M. L. Houser: speed (Andersen 1979 Christhopel 1990), communication style (Norton 1977), looking for affinity (Frymier 1994), self-discovery (Sorensen 1989), solidarity (Nussbaum and Scott 1980), humor (Wanzer and Frymier 1999), concern (Teven and McCroskey 1997) and compliance (Plax and Kearney 1992). From the teacher's perspective what matters are the perceptions of the students about the importance of communication skills (Frymier and Houser 2000).

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The paradigm of the training skills priority believes that it renders learning the dimension of deeply transforming the subject involved. Communication is understood as a transversal competence (D'Hainaut 1981), which supports varied, complex, divergent communication based on the adequacy of the repository and the overcome of the language barriers.
Linguistic communication competence in the mother tongue is one of the eight key competences required in the XXI century, defined since 2006 by the European Parliament and the European Union Council. The competence of speaking in the mother tongue includes knowledge, skills and attitudes and it is designed to interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions, to dialogue, to solve conflicts, to create communication networks, to build relationships with others and to approach new cultures.

1.2. Methodological aspects of the relation of communication between teacher and students

Being a multidirectional and polyfunctional act, communication is not restricted to transmission, but it also requires an exchange of information, knowledge, views or opinions, attitudes and impressions, etc. From a *psychosocial perspective*, communication is a "fundamental way of psychosocial interaction of people, conducted by means of socially-generalized symbols and meanings of reality in order to achieve stability or behavioral changes of the individual or the group" (Chelcea 1981).

From the wide range of studies on communication analysis, there stands the communication approach from a psychosocial perspective, approach that J.-C. Abric (2002) agrees with:

• Communication is a phenomenon based on *interaction* and occurs as an *exchange relationship* between partners, each acting as transmitter and receiver;

• Communication is a *social fact*, that characterizes the human being and, therefore, any behavior acquires the value of a message;

• Communication uses *multiple channels* by which meanings are spread;

• Communication is a *process* with an ending character, which requires intentionality;

• Communication is influenced by *the cultural and social context* it takes place place in;

• Communication operates as a circular system, equipped with self-adjustment, the system of this adjustment being feed-back.

To communicate means to build together, to add, to contextualize, to shade, to interpret, to act on, to negotiate, to identify (not just to internalize). Interpersonal relationships mediate the construction of individual knowledge, which develops on co-construction. The orientation of "mutual constructivism ", in the community is combined with the use of information technology, of communication in education (Pountney, et al. 2002).

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From an educational point of view, we consider that *the interactional and constructivist perspective* are the most important for the formation and development of communication skills, initiative achieved in formal education, against the relation between teacher and student.

The constructivist perspective is the one that assigns the role of permanent and active manufacturer of the personality. In essence, social constructivism (LS Vîgotski) rounds the other forms (radical constructivism – E. Von Glasersfeld and cognitive constructivism – J. Piaget) by emphasizing the social nature of knowledge, based on interaction, in the community, of the language as a means of knowledge and enrichment of the cognitive experience, together with the role of the cultural context and interpersonal relations. The negotiations, confrontations, debates, group resolutions mediate the construction of the individual knowledge and makes everyone aware of his/ her "zone of proximal development", which roles may be suitable for asserting competencies.

As an alternative to other approaches in the study of human behavior, H. Blumer proposed interactionism, the framework he formulated his precepts on social life. By the term symbolic interactionism, Blumer wants to assert the primacy of the construction of meaning within social interaction. Compared to the behaviorist tradition, Blumer thinks that actors build their actions based on interpretations of the situations they are part of. Therefore, individuals do not passively submit to the macrosociological factors. The organization of the society only structures social situations. Starting from their own interpretations of these situations, the actors act. Communication and understanding, which are the fundamentals of a beneficial human interaction, are mediated by the system of symbols universally significant (words, gestures, etc.). According to Blumer (1969), this view is based on three basic principles (Claxton and Murray 1994): people behave toward objects depending on the meanings objects have for them; meanings are created by social interaction between people; the individual later learns these meanings through a dynamic and interpretative process, which applies to everything come accross in life experience.

Based on these approaches to communication, we notice some *methodological references and suggestions* that may contribute to the formation and development of communication skills:

1) When *the teacher is open and encourages communication*, students feel encouraged and respected. They feel appreciated when the teacher gives them the opportunity to contribute or, in other words, when the teacher asks for a notice (which usually does not involve students). In this situation, the teacher does not give up control, but rather, he/ she shares control with students and encourages interactions that are agreed upon (open and supportive communication).

2) *The teacher maintains a close relationship with all students* being helpful for those students who are shy, introverted (who find it hard to speak in

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front of the other) or for those who have low self esteem. The tension of these students may decrease or disappear when they trust the teacher, when they feel support and stimulation from him/ her (tight, cohesive communication).

3) Having feed-back is important, and from this perspective *the teacher must establish a positive, emotional relation* with the students and learn more about his/her students. Respect for students generates, most of the time, a sense of excitement. If, on this basis, we use multiple channels of communication in transmitting and receiving messages, there is an increase in the actractivity of the communicative act (lateralized, bidirectional and/or multidirectional communication).

4) In achieving communication, it is important that *the teacher uses teaching materials and teaching aids* (traditional and modern) to ease, facilitate the spread of knowledge, to demonstrate, to motivate, to inform, but mostly to build and support students in building – ideas, arguments, theories, solutions etc. (constructive communication).

5) *The communication of positive expectations favorably influence the academic performance* of students, as specified by the studies carried out in the 80s by S. Kerman, T. Kimball & M. Martin (apud Boynton and Boyton 2005). It is important for teachers to communicate behavioral and academic expectations elevated enough for all students, not only for those at a higher level of performance (positive, plurimodal communication – carried out frontally, in the group / team and individually).

6) *The teacher can avoid communication barriers* by the correct identification of the restraining factors and by knowing and valorizing the stimulating ones (anticipative, flexible communication).

7) The opinions, views, divergent ideas that sometimes appear during teaching activities can cause confusion, uncertainty and even the refuse to receive, decode and process the content transmitted. Therefore, it is necessary for *the teacher to resort to a communication which is able to facilitate understanding the messages and carrying out different tasks*, contributing, among other things, to time and energy saving (complex, convergent communication).

An effective communication is the one in which we know what we have to say, but also what the others expect from us. Even if teachers,as well as lawyers or actors, have to master the art of speech, few manage to be orators, to master very well the art of human relations development from which perspective is important not only to know how to speak but also to listen (active, in-depth, sometimes objective, sometimes emphatically.)

2. Elements of pedagogical research

2.1. The aim, objectives and research hypotheses

The goal of the research aims at knowing the main approach perspectives of communication and at highlighting the methodological, practical and applied

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aspects able to increase its effectiveness in relations between teachers and students.

The objectives that we have been interested in are related to the overall purpose and include:

1) Specifying the theoretical framework of the theme focusing on the perspectives of approaching communication, on the theories, the most popular models of communication;

2) Identifying the specific of didactic communication in the relation between teachers and students and shaping communication skills;

3) The implementation, during the formal activities, of some rules and methodological suggestions in educational practice in order to optimize teaching communication;

4) Testing research hypothesis and drawing conclusions that come from the interpretation of the results.

The research hypothesis: If students-future teachers know and apply the methodological recommendations that express the means of achieving effective communication, then they will get superior results in terms of communication skills.

2.2. The organizational framework

This study is based on a practical and applied pedagogical research conducted during the academic years 2013-2014 (the theoretical analysis of the conceptual framework, the broadening of the theoretical research, the start data collection on the main aspects of communication competencies of the students – first semester) and 2014-2015 (the independent variable implementation, the proper conduct of the research and analysis, the processing and interpretation of the final data – semester II).

The independent variable includes the system of norms and rules, suggestions of a methodological nature that we used during the conduct of educational activities, specific to the "Classroom Management" course and seminar.

The sample included in the research was made of 71 students from the third year of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (41 students – Department of Mathematics and Informatics, 13 students – Department of Physics and 17 students – Department of Chemistry).

2.3. The methodological framework

During the first semester of the academic year 2014-2015, we used the *observation method* in seminar activities, in order to identify the main aspects of the communicative competence of students.

By referring to the communication sphere of competence we have specifically targeted the following:

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Table 1. Specific aspects of the communication competence

Communication competence	***Features, indicators – specific aspects (A_n)***
Knowledge (about the specific of communication, in general, and the contents of the psycho-pedagogical subjects, in particular) *Capacities* (comprehension, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, transfer, etc.)	A 1: Knowledge of the main theories of communication; A 2: Identification of the specific of didactic communication (from the perspective of the role of future teachers); A 3: Specification, accurate definition of the key concepts of the psycho-pedagogical disciplines A 4: Ability to understand and make others understant, too (classmates, teachers and students from schools of application), to understand different messages in various situations; A 5: Ability to read and understand different texts (especially those with psycho-pedagogical and methodological content); A 6: Ability to create and write, edit texts for educational purposes; A 7: Ability to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant pedagogical information; A 8: Ability to formulate their own arguments in a convincing manner and take into account other points of view, expressed orally and / or in writing;
Attitudes (to their own educational discourse, in relation to how they dealt with information, on one hand, and the others in relation to the manner in which information is received, listened to and responded to by the others' messages, on the other hand)	A 9: Honesty in issuing educational messages with an educational character and objectivity in presenting scientific content; A10: Tolerance in accepting the opinions and the divergent views of others; A11: Openness to joining types of communication, using multichanneling and teaching materials or educational means A12: Readiness to encourage others to be flexible, to positively appreciate the others, to encourage them throughout communication

After recording the initial results (2013-2014), we have introduced the independent variable, telling the students (through *briefing* at the beginning of Semester II of the 2014-2015 academic year) the content of the methodological

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system of rules and suggestions taken into account during the course and seminar activities.

The dependent variable of *the educational experiment* conducted is represented by the scores of the students in each indicator (according to the aspects which we considered to be specific and we have noted symbolically with A_n).

3. The results of the research

Comparing the findings recorded (based on the observation of behavior in activities, the students-future teachers, the individual interventions and those of the group) we centralized the results obtained (in pretest stage and posttest stage):

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Table 2. *The results obtained by the students in pretest and posttest*

Students	***Aimed aspects*** ***(A_n)***	***Results in pretest*** *(2013-2014, semester I)*				***Resultse in posttest*** *(2014-2015, semester II)*	
		Insufficient	*Sufficient*	*Good*	*Very good*	*Insufficient*	*Sufficient*
Mathematics and Informatics (41)	A_1: Knowledge	17 (23.94%)	19 (26.76%)	16 (22.54%)	19 (26.76%)	6 (8.45%)	10 (14.08%)
Physics (13)	A_2: Knowledge	13 (18.31%)	11 (15.49%)	27 (38.03%)	20 (28.17%)	5 (7.04%)	6 (8.45%)
Chemistry(17)	A_3: Knowledge	8 (11.27%)	14 (19.72%)	17 (23.94%)	32 (45.07%)	2 (2.82%)	17 (23.94%)
	A_4: capacities	2 (2.82%)	8 (11.27%)	23 (32.39%)	38 (53.52%)	- -	15 (21.13%)
	A_5: capacities	4 (5.63%)	12 (16.90%)	35 (49.30%)	20 (28.17%)	- -	14 (19.72%)

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	A $_6$: capacities	8	7	44	12	5	17
		(11.27%)	(9.86%)	(61.97%)	(16.90%)	(7.04%)	(23.94%)
	A $_7$: capacities	11	9	26	25	6	-
		(15.49%)	(12.68%)	(36.62%)	(35.21%)	(8.45%)	-
	A $_8$: capacities	5	28	-	38	1	5
		(7.04%)	(39.44%)	-	(53.52%)	(1.41%)	(7.04%)
	A $_9$: attitudes	2	16	25	28	-	19
Total 71		(2.82%)	(22.54%)	(35.21%)	(39.43%)	-	(26.76%)
(N = 71)	A$_{10}$: attitudes	10	15	37	9	4	7
		(14.08%)	(21.13%)	(52.11%)	(12.68%)	(5.63%)	(9.86%)
	A$_{11}$: attitudes	9	-	26	36	-	-
		(12.68%)	-	(36.62%)	(50.70%)	-	-
	A$_{12}$: attitudes	15	23	17	16	2	-
		(21.13%)	(32.39%)	(23.94%)	(22.54%)	(2.82%)	-

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The comparative analysis of the recorded data shows some differences in the percentage obtained in the followed indicators. Among them, we highlight a few. Thus:

• In all indicators we have achieved better results in the posttest stage, which expresses the positive influence of the system of rules and recommendations in training and developing the communicative competence;

• In posttest, there were not registered any results associated to the insufficient qualifier in two issues (A4 and A5), which demonstrates the contribution of practices implemented to improve the capacity of understanding in various situations and the ability to read and understand different texts with a psycho-pedagogical and methodological content;

• In terms of attitudes, the degree of objectivity increased in presenting scientific content (A9) and the degree of availability in communication as well as the flexibility and recognition, namely acceptance of others' opinions (A12);

• The lowest ratings of *Good* and *Very good* in posttest were recorded for the indicator A6 (69.02%), and the most grades of *Good* and *Very good* for indicator A11 (100%). This indicates the difficulty of students to create and write, edit texts for educational purposes. On the other hand, we can observe an openness to mixing the types of communication, using multichanneling and teaching materials, or the educational means.

According to the current requirements in pedagogy, the skills asked for from the students can no longer be limitted to the ability to decide on something, on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the problem, in an informative way, with the minimization of the pragmatic, actionable side. Therefore, we were interested in the attitudes of the students, too, and the results we have reached express openness to communication, tolerance, principles. It follows that the emphasis on promoting knowledge, learning as a result of social mediation, dialogue, mutual adapting of the communication styles is an effective measure contributing to the development of the art of relating.

Conclusions

Being eminently social, people are interested in communicating with other fellows of theirs. Always in constant interaction, we establish relations that require knowledge and mutual accommodation that would gain a vast baggage of information.

Relations between groups and individuals do not explain everything; therefore, we recommend taking into consideration the type of social structure (more individualist or collectivist) that influences our behaviors (of the teachers' and the students'), the personal history of student, the age of the actors involved, the type of previous experience that also marks (sometimes decisively) the unfolding of the activities in which human individuals are involved.

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Since communication in mother tongue is one of the key-competencies (alongside communication in foreign languages, basic competencies in maths, science and technology, computer skills, competence to learn, social and civic competences, entrepreneurship skills and competence of cultural expression) the formation and development of interpersonal relations in students is a priority objective in education today. It may be observed that students have achieved high results in communicative competence and the recommendations, suggestions and the rules about optimizing communication were the base and the reason of communicative competence development, so important in the educational relation.

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