OBSERVARE
Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa

e-ISSN: 1647-7251
Vol. 8, Nº. 2 (November 2017-April 2018), pp. 123-128

JANUS.NET
e-journal of International Relations

Notes

COMMUNICATION FOR EDUCATION. FROM TEACHER TO FACILITATOR IN LEARNING AND DISCOVER PROCESSES [1]

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Communication for education

The way in which teachers manage their interactions (environment, methodology, encouragement, respect, trust etc.) produces different kinds of learning and behaviour models. There has always been a close interdependence between communication and education, because the act to educate is, first of all, a relational and communicative one. For this reason, the essay focuses on emerging competences which can describe a **facilitator of learning and discovery process**.

To communicate means to educate

Didactical pedagogical research shows us that the way in which teachers manage their interactions (environment, methodology, encouragement, respect, trust, students' discovery process, etc.) produces different kinds of learning and behaviour models. For this reason, we need to focus on the way through which we can analyse the relevance of communicative competences, social and leadership skills and methodological approach. The question is: *what kind of communicative skills activated by educators can favour the learning and discovery process?*

[1] The revision of this article was funded by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia - as part of OBSERVARE project with the reference UID/CPO/04155/2013, with the aim of publishing Janus.net. Text reviewed by Carolina Peralta.

Didactical activities and cooperative learning are based on verbal communication, accompanied by an intense non-verbal communication and management of proxemics space. For this reason, the observation of what happens in the "black box" of the classroom is considered a communication research. Through communication, we can observe specific characteristics of interaction in learning contexts: the asymmetry of the relationship; the specific routines that regulate the interactions among teacher and learners (the lesson, the transaction, the trade off, the explanation, the interrogation, the assessment, the feedback etc.); and the peculiarities assumed by the hidden curriculum in the interaction between teacher and students. In an educational environment, we can distinguish three different kind of interactions: learners-learners; learners-contents and resources or experiences; learners-educators. So, when we consider risk factors connected to interaction, we have to observe quality and quantity modes: types of interactions, domains of interactions (cognitive, affective), frequencies of interaction, gender-specific interactions, cultural-specific interactions; but also collaborative interaction typical of a *community of practice*; and the emotional dimension of learning with regard to psychodynamic or affective aspects which can favour or prevent learning. For these reasons, we will reflect about elements that favour a positive learning process, analysing the correlation between communication and education.

The social research about the observation of the classroom interactions can adopt different perspectives. The first one is the *socio linguistic approach* that studies the use of the language in different learning contexts. The second one is the *ethnographic approach* that examines what happens in the classroom daily, paying attention to the process of knowledge construction. The third one is the *psycho-social approach* that investigates behaviours and communication styles in the classroom through climate classroom observation. These are issues that we try to explore, briefly, in next lines, underlining their relevance in learning and discovery processes. This way, we can observe the relevance of teachers' communicative competences. *Communicative competences* include many skills that speakers require for effective communication and appropriate speech, such as *linguistic competence*, which is the ability to understand and produce correct forms in phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical terms; *metalinguistic competence,* which refers to the ability to reflect a linguistic phenomena; *sociolinguistic competence,* referring to the selection of linguistic forms and registers, which have to be appropriate to the socio-cultural context in which the communicative event takes place, suited to the status and role of all participants; *strategic competence*, or ability, to use the language to achieve the goals of the communication; *textual and discursive competences* to understand the production, identification and classification of texts, communicative genres and discursive sequences; *paralinguistic competence,* referring to the hidden items, i.e. intonation, pauses, tone, speed, and volume of discourse; *extra-linguistic competences*, commonly defined as the ability to use nonverbal codes properly and effectively, together with the language, or in place of it, and the different skills that are part of it (kinesics competence, proxemics and vestemics); the ability to recognize and use *different* communication *tools*; the *cultural competence* concerning the socio-cultural norms, values, customs, behaviours of all participants, and the *cross-cultural skills*, which highlight the cultural variability and the need to respect different symbolic heritages in a global context, which also includes online learning[2]. In online interactions,

[2] With the development of ICT we have also to consider the issues of media literacy, digital literacy and media competences.

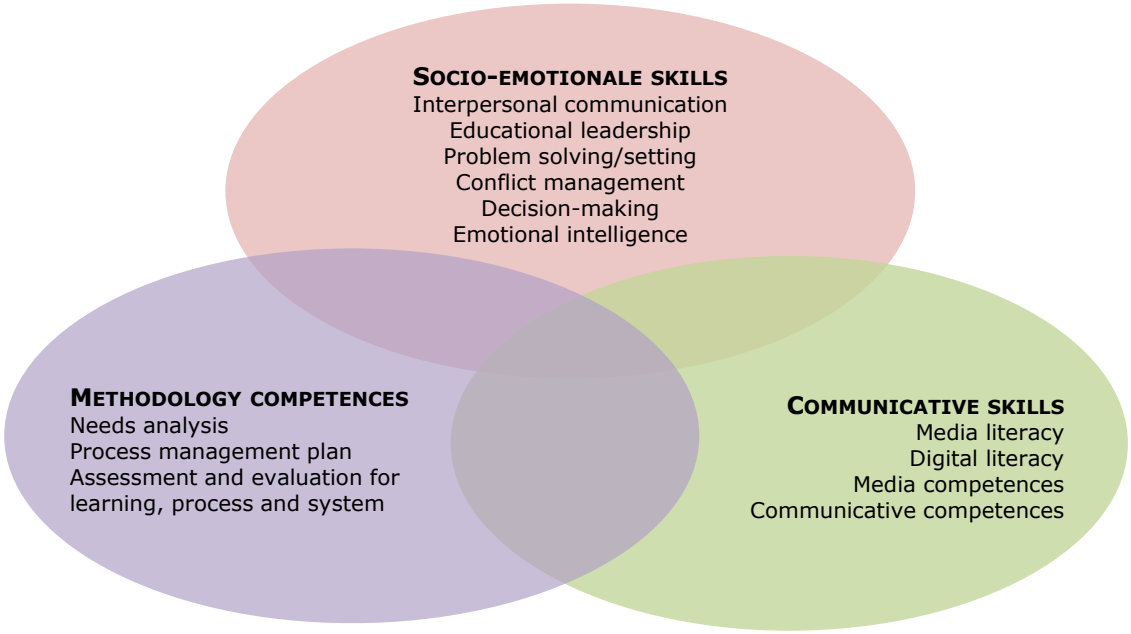
several of these elements change profoundly, i.e. the *paralinguistic and extralinguistic competences*. We can highlight seven elements that influence effective communication: issuer, receiving, cooperation, quantity, quality, relation and mode (Grice, 1975). Also on the bases of this element, we can distinguish different styles of communication that is always an instrument to build an intentional interaction to meet the others and generate sense making and learning, common rules and a sense of community. For this reason, to become facilitators in learning and discovery processes, both face to face and online, we have to improve communication skills, but also social skills, emotional intelligence (that is relevant for an assertive communication style), and methodological skills. To be a good communicator requires a high level of self-awareness. Social psychology studies can be very useful to decline social skills for observing the space in which the didactical relation takes shape. We can consider four mean dimensions of social skills: i*nterpersonal communication skills* (related to the ability to *manage a message* remembering different levels of *interpersonal communication)*; l*eadership skills* (the sum of individual skills that allow individuals to *manage a group*); p*roblem solving* and *problem setting* (the sum of individual skills that allow to define a problem and understand the situation); p*ositive and constructive management of the conflict and decision making*.

Continuing this reflection, we can consider *what kind of social and leadership skills should characterize a good communicator.* The emotional studies (Ashkanasy, Humphrey, 2011) have illustrated that we can observe emotion at five different levels: within a person; between persons, at interpersonal level; among groups and team and at organization wide level. In our case, we consider emotion within groups and teams with regard to the problem of: leadership (direct influence and emotional contagion); group affect (affective team member exchange and group emotional intelligence) and group behaviour and performance. For this reason, the concept of *emotional intelligence* becomes relevant. Goleman (2011) identified four important dimensions to study this concept: **self-awareness**; **self-management**; **social awareness** and **relationship management**. We can recognise two different ways through which positive and negative emotions influence the learning cycle. In the first one, a positive emotions cycle (that develops from anxiety through uncertainty, risk acceptance and fight), leads the person through her/his intuition promoting learning and the discovery process; while, in the second one, the negative emotions cycle arises from anxiety (such as those of escape or fight; refusal or avoidance, defence or resistance) conducting the learner to the acceptance of her/his prevent ignorance (Illeris, 2003). Learners move up through the "emotional spiral" (Kort, et. al. 2001), cycle after cycle, becoming more competent and acquiring more domain knowledge. It is a travel through learning and empowering. In each stage, the teacher has to combine different sets of communication and methodologies competences to accompany learners throughout their discovery. In this sense, a teacher should look more like a facilitator than a content expert both in face to face and in online education processes, where it is impossible to imagine a close knowledge system detained by teachers. Thinking of teachers' core competences in a digital era means identifying the process by which technologies can be included in teaching practises.

Puentedura created the SAMR model that identifies four stages of increasing complexity to which different methods and strategic skills correspond. The first one is characterized by *replacement, which* consists in the exploration of ICT capabilities alongside traditional media. This discovery phase aims to support the brainstorming process, useful both to

stimulate creative, lateral and divergent thinking and accompany students to explore new connections, hypotheses and research questions. At this stage, first of all, the teacher should act as a coach, able to activate latent and untapped students' potential resources. She/he should support their motivation and participation; favouring the team building process, providing support and direction in building the knowledge path to starting. The second one is the *enlargement phase* in which, through the variety of media offered by the ICT, students can expand their knowledge bases and opportunities, thanks to a conscious use of open educational resources, documents and official sources, magazines, databases, etc. At this stage, students have to analyse the topic and the problem chosen. The teacher should lead the group in searching and selecting sources to analyse and investigate the theme to develop meaningful insights. The teacher should act as a facilitator, to continue to ensure adequate motivational support, to guide and supervise the process in terms of resources and group management, flows and workload. The third one is the *experimentation* phase, in which students are engaged in developing new contents or knowledge products, even in a collaborative way. At this stage, the teacher should guide students towards the logical and coherent organization of their knowledge, supporting a solid argumentative process, through the testing of hypotheses and research questions that guide their work. At this stage, it is important to keep attention to tasks and objectives, to enable monitoring and evaluation measures, not only in learning results, but also with respect to the learning process, to ensure the appropriate redesign of educational activities. The last one consists in the *development* of new tools, projects and knowledge products, choosing multimedia technologies more appropriate to the identified knowledge goal and target, because each medium has its own and distinctive communication code. This last phase is characterized by the critical reflection of the experience and knowledge acquired, and its systematization within wider knowledge systems.

Fig. 1 Core Competences teaching



Therefore, the teacher should drive the meta-evaluation, the enhancement and dissemination process, aimed at sharing the results achieved, and help students to recognize (and appropriate themselves of) the progresses reached. On the bases of these reflections, we can say that each stage corresponds to a different style that we might call "situational". A style that must be capable of acting upon different skills, referring to the learning goal we have to lead by means of new technologies. Three are styles that we can synthetize as follows: the motivational style in the start-up phase; the steering style in the investigation phase; the supportive style in the experimental stage and a constructive feedback in the systematization phase.

2. Conclusions

All this involves a radical alteration of the traditional educational setting. To educate in the digital era requires a new educational pact among school, society, families and students. We watch the disintegration of educational relationships which are changing the power connection between teacher and student, within a class that appears more and more "liquid" because it loses the usual space and time boundaries. In conclusion, to promote learning and discovering processes in our learners, we need to assure training through which teachers can improve appropriate soft skills (social-emotional, communicative and methodological skills), to become facilitators. This reflection shows that efficient interpersonal relations among group members, induce proper collaboration, oriented towards a good group climate and able to stimulate individual responsibility. The quality of interactions and communication ensure the quality of the teaching-learning process. Generally, we say that the communication is based on three channels of perception (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic), forgetting that there is the emotional channel, which builds a bridge between us and the others. It is based on the universal language of emotions that science explains through the "mirror neurons". If communication means to educate, education in communication also involves educating the recognition both of emotions and the symbolic heritage that confronts the intercultural encounter with others, and their respect.

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Como citar esta Nota

Capogna, Stefania (2017). "Communication for education. From teacher to facilitator in learning and discover processes". Notes, *JANUS.NET e-journal of International Relations*, Vol. 8, N.º 2, November 2017-April 2018. Consulted [online] on the date of last consultation Handle