

The elements of the didactic communication process - a theoretical presentation

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Abstract

This article represents a theoretical approach to the elements of the didactic communication process. Our theoretical plea will open with the distinction between educational communication and didactic communication. Then, following the line of analysis drawn by the classical theories of communication, we will present some interdisciplinary approaches to the elements of the didactic communication process: the teacher and the student in their double capacity of transmitters and receivers, the pedagogical message transmitted in the traditional or virtual classroom, the feedback and the specific features of the context of this type of communication. Our theoretical analysis restates the need for analysis and understanding of didactic communication by all actors involved, considering that the quality of didactic communication directly influences the quality of teaching – learning – evaluation in the educational system.

Keywords: *didactic communication; communicative competence; pedagogical message; feedback; educational communication*

1. Introduction

In the continuously expanding space of communication forms, the concept of *didactic communication* does not meet the consensus of all specialists. In specialized literature we find two more similar concepts, educational communication, or pedagogical communication.

To Iacob (2009: 190) didactic communication represents “an instrumental communication directly involved in supporting an

authentic process of communication “, without compulsory reference to the relationship teacher-student, but to the rules imposed by the learning act. Cristea (2002: 47) defines it as “an axiomatic principle of education that presupposes an educational message, elaborated by the subject capable of provoking the formative reaction of the object of education, evaluable in terms of external and internal inverse connection”. For Cucuș (2002: 63) this is “a complex, multifaceted and multi-channel transfer of information between two entities (individuals or groups) that simultaneously and successively assume the roles of transmitters and receivers signifying desirable contents in the context of the instructive-educational process”.

To complete this mapping of the definitions presented in specialised literature, Sălăvăstru (2004: 189) explicitly introduces the obligation of fulfilling some simultaneously valid conditions to ensure that some communication can be considered didactic: a) to be an act that intends to produce changes in the knowledge, affectivity, behaviour or action of the person receiving the communication; b) to take place in an organised framework and to respect certain principles of efficiency; c) to take place in specialised institutions (school, university); d) to be subject to evaluation in relation to an ideal set by the institution hosting it. Frumos pleads for the understanding of didactic communication as a process of social relation that takes place in a broad context in which the objectives pursued by the teacher and student, the context in which they relate, how they perceive this interaction and concrete communication actions are essential (Frumos 2018: 124 -126). Cojocaru-Borozan (2001) presents the concept of didactic communication based on emotional culture and defines it as “a communication specific to the educational process in order to develop, within the didactic objectives, the emotional potential of education agents expressed in emotional values materialised in a style of charismatic communication (fascinating and attractive)”.

Starting from the observation that we are subject to educational influences even outside the organised framework of the school, these

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acts of communication belong to the wider sphere of educational communication. Any form of didactic communication is also a form of educational communication. But the reciprocal is not true: "we are constantly subject to discursive interventions of an educational type, but we are subject to didactic interventions only in certain periods of personality formation". Didactic communication represents the basis on which the teaching-learning-evaluation process is achieved, while educational communication is fundamental to the process of permanent (self) education to which the individual is subjected (Sălăvăstru 2004: 191). In full agreement with Cerghit (2008: 52), we consider that any analysis of the structure of didactic communication must include the following elements: communication subjects (actors, characters, agencies), active and latent repertoires of subjects, message, forms or the manner of presentation of the contents, the code or material support of the message, its transmission channel and psychosocial, physical and temporal context in which the transmission takes place, disturbing or interfering factors, intentions or purposes of communication, feedback, effects or influences on communication subjects.

2. The teacher and the student: partners in the act of didactic communication

The educational process represents an act of transmission/communication of some cognitive, action-related and affective-attitudinal contents and of formative influence of the members of the (micro) school groups. (Bocoş, Chiş 2013: 159). In this transmission process, the teacher, as sender, initiates the act of communication and delivers to the student, as receiver, intelligible, accessible, well-structured and well-argued messages. Although the distribution of the teacher and the student in the roles of sender and receiver is not fixed, but in a continuous change, the teacher remains predominantly in the role of main actor of communication and the student in the one of first subject of reception. In order to send effective messages to students, the teacher must simultaneously meet two conditions: credibility and attractiveness. The credibility of the sender's messages is determined by

his value, prestige, authority, authenticity, and competence (Dumitriu 1998: 7).

The competence of didactic communication is understood in a synthetic way by Sadovei (2008: 137) as “the set of communicative behaviours necessary for elaborating/ transmitting/ evaluating the didactic discourse and for building productive communication networks in the educational context.” Offering more details necessary to outline the concept, Șoitu (1997: 42) considers that the suitable term is "communication skills", considering that it covers two categories of skills: 1) direct – linguistic skills, discursive, situational, paraverbal and 2) indirect – psycholinguistic, intellectual, social, cultural, informational skills.

At an overview, we say that a teacher-transmitter manifests his communication skills at the discursive level (through linguistic normativity, coherent and intelligible discourse, pedagogical language, discursive strategies, rational persuasion, scientific fidelity and relevance, personalisation) and at the relational level through cooperative style, affective persuasion, distributivity of attention, behavioral flexibility, empathic conversation, emotional balance, affective expressiveness, and positive feedback (Sadovei 2008, Șoitu 1997).

The receiver never passively assimilates the didactic message, but reacts according to his own psychological, cognitive, and social characteristics (Abric 2002: 16-25). Active listening involves an effort of will on his part and more attitudes towards receiving the message. Dickson & Hargie (2004: 174-175) identify five types of active listening: 1) discriminative – which involves monitoring visual and auditory simulations to provide feedback; 2) comprehensive – activated in case of receiving informative or instructive messages; 3) evaluative in the situation of detecting persuasive elements placed in messages; 4) appreciative when the receiver is sensitised emotionally, culturally, spiritually; 5) empathic when the receiver demonstrates the ability to understand the sender's thoughts, beliefs, or feelings.

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The two actors directly involved in the didactic communication process have active or latent repertoires, repertoires that need a common denominator that favours mutual openness and information exchanges. In full agreement with Cerghit (2008: 53) we consider that the teacher's repertoire must contain the professional-scientific competence held by him, the communicative competence and the professional-psycho-pedagogical competence and, last but not least, his own social or personality characteristics. The student's repertoire includes the mental, attitudinal-affective and linguistic structures, social, psychological and physical, age-related and individual characteristics, the influences coming from the social environment of which he is part. Didactic communication is possible only when the participants' repertoires are compatible and they contain enough common elements in their structure (Cojocariu, 2007, p.34).

3. The socio-linguistic codes and the pedagogical message

Any communication process involves the existence of a common code internalised by the participants and (de)coding the message by them. In the case of verbal communication, the best-known code is language. In order to rigorously analyse the different codes existing in a language, Bernstein (1978) introduces the concept of socio-linguistic code and identifies two main variants of codes: elaborate codes and restricted codes.

The restricted code allows a high degree of lexical or syntactic predictability because the subject uses poor vocabulary and a simple and rigid syntax, the para-linguistic or extra-verbal component of communication being essential for (de) coding the message. He inhibits the expression of individual peculiarities, rather cultivating intellectual and affective similarities. It also has a pronounced particular character because the meanings conveyed depend on the social context and are accessible only to those who share common cultural values. The subject who uses the elaborated code has at his disposal a rich and nuanced vocabulary, more complex ways of organising the sentence that enable him to express his thoughts without necessarily resorting to para-verbal

means. The developed code leads to differentiations between individuals, expressing their tendency towards autonomy and self-control. This code has universal character and can be accessible to subjects belonging to different (sub) cultures (Stănciulescu 1997: 77-79). In didactic communication, the code is always chosen by reference to the receiver, the teacher having to use a high-performance code with as little ambiguity as possible.

The didactic message is built curricularly at the level of the optimal interdependence between information and positive training (Cristea, 2016: 47). It contains information materialised in sets of knowledge, skills and values in the field of education. The intelligibility of the message depends not only on its length, banality, originality or difficulty, but also on the ability to know and understand the receiver and his expectations (Dumitriu 1998: 93). Therefore, the didactic message does not fully exist in the act of communication but is structured even during its transmission.

The didactic message can be transmitted in the traditional classroom, through the face-to-face interaction between teacher and student, or in the virtual classroom, through computer-mediated communication. In the virtual learning environment, the didactic message is transmitted through synchronous and asynchronous communication, through open source learning management systems (Moodle, for example), video and teleconferencing systems (such as Zoom) or unified communication and collaboration systems (e.g. Microsoft Teams) (Glava 2020: 194). Pressures for the digitalisation of society and the unprecedented development of technology have given digital natives the opportunity to send and receive educational messages, as well as to be actively involved in the act of collaborative learning and through social networks (Măță 2013; Pătruț B., Pătruț M., Cmeciu 2013; Pătruț M., Pătruț B 2013; Măță, 2019).

4. Feedback and context in didactic communication

In the teacher-student relationship, the communication scheme consists of sequences organised in three steps: initiation – response – evaluation (Frumos 2018: 55-56). The teacher initiates a communication sequence through which he transmits or requests information from the student, he responds to the request received and the teacher evaluates the response. This last step is called feedback or follow-up. Feedback is indispensable for didactic communication because it indicates to the teacher the extent to which his message has been understood, believed, and accepted. In specialized literature positive, supportive, probing or understanding evaluative feedback is recommended to the detriment of the negative one (Pânișoară 2015: 58-61).

In addition to feedback, another form of didactic response is feedforward. Unlike feedback that is past-oriented, feedforward involves providing future-oriented options or solutions (Ezekiel 2001: 43). It aims to regulate the student's learning activity or model a future behavior in the expected direction by communicating expectations/requirements, often underlying the phenomenon called self-fulfillment of prophecy (Tauber 1997: 18-20). The act of didactic communication needs an optimal level of feedback because it increases the efficiency of the message, contributes to the improvement of the interpersonal relationship and to the consolidation of a secure climate for the participants.

Didactic communication takes place in a context that includes three school-specific dimensions: psychosocial, physical and temporal. The psychosocial dimension refers to the elements of school culture, the roles of participants and belonging to certain groups or (informal) status, mentalities, the physical is defined by the elements of the environment, while the temporal dimension is defined by the historical, personal or daily time (Pânișoară 2015: 67). Each dimension of the context will put its imprint on communication, learning and the teacher-student relationship.

5. Conclusions

Didactic communication is not only a tool for conveying information that will contribute to the fulfillment of the instructive and educational objectives provided by the school curricula, but, especially, a psychosocial process of (inter) influence and mutual modeling of the behaviors, beliefs and attitudes of the two actors involved. In this article, we have presented the components of the didactic communication process to emphasize, again, that each element and the interdependence between them directly influence the quality of communication, teaching and learning in the educational institution.

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