



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

WAYS OF DEVELOPING THE COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN THE INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

Flavia MALUREANU*, Luiza ENACHI-VASLUIANU*

*The Department for Teachers' Training, the Focșani Branch, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Studies, University of Bucharest, Focșani, Romania

Abstract: *Activating the communicative competence is a prerequisite for an efficient activity of the future teacher. Its formation and development on students involves a level of performance which is based on knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation. The competence of communication is acquired through learning which can be of various nature and can be gradually polished up. On the one hand, we may speak of a rationally guided learning of the type „how to do”, on the other hand, we may speak of learning through direct involvement in the action.*

The programme of initial formation conducted in the Department for Teachers' Training, the Focsani Branch, is based on the idea according to which the competence of communication concerns the students in their dual capacity: educated and future educators and focuses on its development through the utilization of strategies centred on interaction. During the seminars we lay emphasis on modern interactive methods that enable intercommunication sequences. The purpose of these strategies / methods is not only to improve cognitive acquisitions, but to develop competences which underpin the construction of a harmonious professional personality prepared according to specialization, but, at the same time, endowed with a large horizon of general knowledge, with an attitude open towards novelty, with personal and professional equilibrium.

Keywords: *communicative competence, initial teacher training program, effective teaching*

The skills that ensure the correct premises for a personality to achieve effective teaching are professional (scientific), pedagogical, methodological, psychological, social, managerial and communicative [3]. The importance of communication for the effectiveness of education is revealed by its inclusion in the annual evaluation files of the teaching staff.

In a generalist approach, De Vito [4] refers to the communicative competence which he considers to be composed of “one's own knowledge of several social aspects of communication”. By increasing the scope of

the term, Sălăvăstru [11] states that the ability to communicate effectively in any situation is called communicative competence. According to the author, this competence includes:

- the knowledge of communication rules and the skills to implement these rules;
- the knowledge of the contextual influence on the content and on the form of communication and, on this basis, the adequacy of the “behaviour” of communication to the context in which it occurs;
- the knowledge of the individual psychology, the experience of the

interpersonal relationships and a certain social skill to avoid pitfalls and dangers;

- the awareness and the knowledge of the culture of the interlocutor because the principles of the effective communication will vary from one culture to another.

J. Habermas [9] has stated that every act of communication is linked to the presentation of the relevant language that can be understood, to the correct determination of the social relations, to the revelation of the speaker's experience. The communicative competence, according to Jablin [9], is characterized by a set of skills, primary resources that the communicator uses for the communication: strategic knowledge (rules and norms about the appropriate communication) and capabilities (features and abilities).

The communication skills, as described by Păuș [8] in accordance with the recent recommendations of the Council of Europe in terms of language learning include: language skills, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence:

- language skills include lexico-semantic competences, grammatical competences, phonological competences;

- sociolinguistic skills require the knowledge of the elements that indicate social relationships (status of the interlocutors, relationship closeness, record speech), the knowledge of the rules of courtesy, language registers etc.

- pragmatic skills include discursive competences (organization of the sentences, speech planning, information structure, argument construction etc.), functional competences (functional use for precise discourse: description, commentary, exposition, argumentation, persuasion etc.) and competences of power schemes of interaction (verbal exchange models, cooperation, negotiations, recognizing patterns of dominance and subsequent inferiority schemes etc.).

Each component consists of knowledge, attitudes, skills and abilities. Among these components an interdependence relationship is established which is done in practice through the production, the reception, the interaction and the mediation of the message.

Shockley-Zalabak [12] presents the communicative competence through the four forms that it can take:

- knowledge competence (the ability to understand organizational and communicative environment);

- sensitivity competence (the ability to feel / infer the correct meanings and feelings of other members of the organization);

- skill competence (the ability to correctly analyze organizational situations, to initiate and effectively use organizational messages);

- value competence (the ability to assume responsibility for effective communication).

Effective communication in the educational activities involves the activation of the communicative competence, perceived in its double condition, innate and acquired, and expressed simultaneously at three levels: verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal. The communicative competence is an imperative for the teachers and a requirement for the students as educated and future educators. For the teachers, communication is one of the means of exercising their teaching profession. To do it successfully, they should prove highly communicative competence, meaning: the ability to use language skills in order to say something, to explain, to clarify, to ask etc.; the ability to provide correct grammatical structures and use them effectively in teaching communication; the ability to integrate communication in the context of the cognitive, affective, volitional factors; the knowledge of the development, the construction and the operation of the logical type of oral communication and written arguments; the knowledge of the role of gestures, mimicry, silence etc (nonverbal behaviour) [2]. Teachers should try to meet all these requirements, to promote and to cultivate them in their students.

With respect to the oral and written teacher's language, Charlotte Danielson [10] sets out a scale of reference for the performance:

Unsatisfactory level: the teacher's speech is at an inaudible level or the writing is unintelligible. The language (oral or written) may contain many grammatical errors; the vocabulary may be inadequate, vague, or used



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

improperly, inducing a state of confusion to the students.

Basic level: the teacher's verbal language is audible and the written language is intelligible. Both are used correctly. Vocabulary is also correct, but limited, or it is not appropriate to the age or to the experience (cognitive, affective etc.) of the pupils.

Competent level: the speech and the writing of the teacher are clear and correct. The vocabulary used is appropriate to the age and interests of the students.

Outstanding level: the speech and the writing of the teacher are correct and expressive, with well-chosen vocabulary that enriches the lesson.

In the context created by this scale it is desirable that all teachers reach the highest level, but it is known that not all are located on the same level of performance with the oral or the written language. To develop and to sustain an optimization approach of the educational communication, teachers have a multitude of possibilities: books and magazines, profile courses etc. But all these requirements are necessary to be known not only by teachers but also by students in order to be able to improve performance of the oral or the written language and to integrate them into communication as an effective approach.

Training and developing the students' communicative competence is one of the purposes of the initial teacher training program. Research in education has shown that the communication objectives are best achieved by focusing on the pragmatic language, the use of language in different contexts, the fluency in speech, the authentic contexts. The training of the communicative competence involves a level of performance based on knowledge, skills and attitudes and an optimal motivation that determines the efficiency of a subject in an activity.

In the initial training programme for primary and preschool teachers we use the modern interactive methods of instruction as a framework for forming and developing the communication skills. In this respect, the methods that have proven their efficiency in lecture and seminar activities are the brainstorming, Philips 6/6, the method of division, the role-playing, the Socratic seminar, the mosaic, the aquarium method, the panel discussion, the creative controversy. We shall not dwell on the detailed presentation of each method as the focus of our activity is on the pragmatic formation of the competence of communication in the conversational context created by these methods. Based on the teaching experience in the university field we have noticed that the general advantages of using them are the following: they motivate students to learn, they incite to dialogue, to reflection, they involve the formation of new ideas, opinions and arguments, they create situations of learning centred on intercommunication and, as a result, they become means of personal development. Of course, the series of advantages is much more complex, but we have tried to bring forth only the conclusive aspects in terms of communicative competence.

In the beginning of the academic year, the students are familiarized with a number of indicators which underpin the formation and the development of the competence of communication of an effective teacher. In order to determine the students to realize the importance of the indicators as well as their level of accomplishment, we have formulated the requirement that they be followed in the activities that use preponderantly the interactive methods. The indicators we have proposed are:

1. *adapting the message to the audience;*

2. *using the support-elements to understand the message;*
3. *the technique of asking questions;*
4. *expressiveness;*
5. *the ethics of communication.*

Adapting the message to the audience means that the teacher should use a language appropriate to the level of knowledge of the pupils (s)he addresses to so that the message should be correctly and completely understood. The educational message must be as attractive as possible, understandable, accessible, without being charged of redundant elements. The sentences should be simple, not too intricate and the connection between the ideas should be clear and logic.

Using the support-elements to understand the message enables the easy and complete reception of the educational message. The teacher's speech must contain data, facts, observations, experiences from daily life alongside with explanations, interpretations, arguments, examples which should allow the pupil to distinguish between the gross fact and the scientific fact. At the same time, there should be used plans of ideas, tables, drawings, images to make the message more intelligible and believable.

The technique of asking questions is valuable as it is a means of stirring the students' intellectual activity and of involving them in the communication process. Underpinning the dialogue and the intercommunication, the questions' role is to lead the discussion on a certain path, to enrich the information, to remove ambiguities, misunderstandings and gaps in the informational process, and, most of all, to deepen understanding. As such, the questions must be clear and precise. Their choice depends on the objective proposed, the subject they can be used at, and on the students the questions are addressed to. In order to optimize intercommunication the teacher must use different types of questions (*factual, empirical, productive* – which do not require one correct answer, *evaluative*). Moreover, they should constitute a crescendo, a scale that the students will climb as they move inside a field of science.

Expressiveness refers to the nuanced formulation of ideas and feelings the teacher intends to convey to his pupils. The importance of expressiveness in the educational communication comes from the fact that the form of the teacher's discourse is the first element the pupil has contact with in the educational process. Before understanding the ideas the teacher conveys, the pupil notices the beauty of his speech.

The ethics of communication is about the "morally" correct behaviour of the communication act. Language, as primary tool of communication, is not easy to deal with. It is a social construct as much as it is a mental ability. It is important for students to be aware of this and they should choose their words and phrases on the basis of a number of variables such as purpose, appropriacy, and language in discourse.

One of the basic rules of efficient intercommunication is that we select language for its denotational (or surface) meaning with a purpose in mind which we wish to achieve. Students must understand that the purposes we propose have a profound impact upon the design of the teaching materials. In order to achieve a communicative purpose we have to choose the most appropriate language forms to use and our choice is governed by a series of variables such as setting (informal and spontaneous language at home, formal pre-planned speech in a work environment), participants (the people involved in an exchange determine the choice of degree of (in)formality of discourse), gender (research has shown that men and women typically use language differently when addressing either members of the same or opposite sex), channel (face to face interaction, telephone conversation, speaking through a microphone to an unseen audience, standing up in a lecture hall in front of a crowd etc will generate different uses of language), topic (affects our lexical and grammatical choices).

Language as discourse is language in use. Thus, the communicational act is described in terms of speed, rhythm regulation, and interaction dominance (involving the three main types of strong initiatives: directing, controlling and inhibiting moves), turn-taking



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

(how people take turns to speak in a conversation), and the patterns and routes which many typical conversations follow. Moreover, in order to ensure the efficiency of the communicational act the students must be educated to "listen actively" when they are not speaking, to transmit their message in a way that does not cause misinterpretation, and be prepared to make inferences from the context, whenever required, to formulate replies and questions in connection to the topic of discussion, to give the correct information, to give the required amount of information, to be brief, orderly, unambiguous and not obscure in their speech acts.

Paralinguistic features such as facial expression, tone of voice, gesture and posture are all part of the way we communicate with each other in face-to-face encounters. When teaching we can draw our students' attention to these as they may send powerful messages about how we feel or what we mean. From the most common facial expression smiling should be used to a great extent. However, according to the context, the student should make plenty use of other signs as well: raising eyebrows to suggest surprise or interest, biting one's lip to indicate thought or uncertainty, compressing the lips to show indecision or obstinacy etc. The gestures should accompany appropriately the facial expression. Thus, crossing one's arms may indicate relaxation, scratching one's head may indicate puzzlement, shrugging shoulders may show lack of specific knowledge, hand-clapping may indicate call for order or congratulations on a good answer etc. Posture can convey meaning too. For instance direct eye contact maintains the channel of communication open and shows interest in what is being said.

All in all, communication is also a matter of linguistic and paralinguistic factors. Students should be made aware of the

importance and the necessity of all these (para)linguistic features in the development of good intercommunication. This could be easily done using video-material to observe other teachers (more or less experienced) or in peer evaluation activities. In seminars, when we have our students study the way language is used in speaking or writing, we will want to draw their attention to these issues. We may ask why a speaker uses particular words or expressions. We may have our students prepare for a speaking activity by assembling the necessary topic words and phrases. We may discuss what sort of (para)language is appropriate in a certain situation etc.

As a result of this approach, the communicative competence accumulates the full set of personal skills: to know, to know what to do, to know to be, to know to become. In order to form the communicative skills to students, the educators themselves must also possess these skills. Therefore, the problem of communication skills concerns the educators and the educated, whether it's training for the first, or it's training and development for the others. Gille [6] stressed that an important educational task is to teach students to communicate, exchange ideas, opinions, to understand, to externalize, because the dialogue means to assume that the interlocutors can learn something from each other. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively and have communicative competence is not enough that students should know the grammatical aspects of the language system or to use a rich vocabulary, but they also need to produce, to develop ideas, to start a conversation, to analyze, to persuade, to argue.

From the above we understand that communicative competence consists of cognitive-theoretical structures and practice, through which communication can be done.

The teachers' task is to provide opportunities for open communication and to form communicative competence to their students through their own example and by providing ongoing guidance to acquire the qualities associated with this type of competence. On the other hand, students have the duty to get actively involved in intercommunication, to follow examples and listen to their teacher's explanations and to improve their activities step by step.

In conclusion, the pedagogical approach we initiated to form and develop the competence of communication has started from the idea that the competences can be learned and polished progressively. In other words, nobody is naturally competent for a particular task, but one becomes competent. The competences, as A. M. Marhan [7] stated are acquired through rationally guided learning of the type „how to do”, with emphasis on “to do” through direct involvement in the action. More precisely, the competence of learning is learned through observing the others, through instructions offered explicitly, through trial and error.

REFERENCES

1. Cabin, P., Dortier, J.F. (coord.). *Comunicarea. Perspective actuale*. Iași: Polirom (2010).
2. Cerghit, I.. *Sisteme de instruire alternative și complementare. Structuri, stiluri și strategii*. Iași: Polirom (2008).
3. Cristea, G.. *Psihologia educației*. București: Coresi (2002).
4. De Vito, J.. *The Interpersonal Communication Book*. New York: Harper, Row Publishers (1988).
5. Harmer, J.. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Edinburgh: Longman (2001).
6. Leroy, G.. *Dialogul în educație*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică (1974).
7. Marhan, A. M.. *Psihologia utilizării noilor tehnologii*. Iași: Institutul European (2007).
8. Păuș, V.A.. *Comunicare și resurse umane*. Iași: Polirom (2006).
9. Pânișoară, I. O.. *Comunicarea eficientă*. Iași: Polirom (2004).
10. Pânișoară, I., O.. *Comunicarea eficientă. Metode de interacțiune educațională*. Iași: Polirom (2003).
11. Sălăvăstru, D.. *Psihologia educației*. Iași: Polirom (2004).
12. Zlate, M.. *Tratat de psihologie organizațional-managerială*. Iași: Polirom (2008).