

EDU WORLD 2018
The 8th International Conference

**THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTIVITY AND AUTHENTIC
COMMUNICATION IN THE PROFESSOR-STUDENT
RELATIONSHIP**

Oprea Valentin Buşu (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Teacher Training Department, University of Craiova, Al. I. Cuza Street, Craiova, Romania,
valentin_busu@yahoo.com,

Abstract

In teaching, it is important to achieve a high level in the learning process by understanding and applying theoretical aspects and engaging reflexivity. This approach allows teachers to focus on reflexive teaching by integrating and adapting their own experiences and perspectives in theoretical contexts, but also by using reflection as a basic method in the training process. The student needs a teacher to increase the efficiency of reflective practice. Collaboration with the teacher, reflexive and authentic communication based on spiritual warmth correlates positively with academic performance. Starting from these theoretical prerequisites, this article attempts to identify students' perceptions and expectations about the teaching-learning process in general and about the relationship with the teacher in particular. Our sample of subjects consists of 88 master students from the Faculty of Letters in the second year (Level II), enrolled in the Department of Teaching Staff Training, University of Craiova. Sometimes, university professors choose to simply read their courses, which generates monotony and boredom. The student adopts the viewer's position, and in this case the formative effects are reduced. Teaching is much more than simple information transmission. Data collected and analyzed have shown that the use of teaching methods focused on authentic and reflexive communication and on teacher-student cooperation has positive effects on both academic performance and on the relationship with the teacher and the inner self.

© 2019 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.UK

Keywords: Authentic communication, reflectivity, academic performance, cooperation, psychological support.



1. Introduction

For both teacher and student, it is important to achieve a profound learning experience, opposed to superficial learning: for self-established purposes, by understanding the theoretical-practical ties and by reflecting on the meanings, in parallel with the understanding of others and engaging the reflexivity through personal development, component which is very discreet in the Romanian education system.

Modern trends indicate that the teaching staff is directly involved in creating a context for the following to take place: stimulating participation, self-assertion, empowerment and self-control of students; exercising their competences through differentiated solicitation, obtaining and maintaining progress, personal development, diversification of academic learning situations through non-formal and informal activities, greatly influencing the stimulating style of communication and genuine contact between the teacher and the learner.

Teachers deserve to be aware of the didactic communication dysfunctions so as to develop the communication skills and the ability to relate them to the group of students in order to enhance learning skills in order to determine the activism and self-esteem of students, reducing apathy, establishing personal projects with realistic perspectives that motivate them.

By promoting empathic and assertive attitudes in the communication of the university cadres with the students, their familiarization with the requirements of the university activities, as well as by ensuring a relaxing, disinhibiting, motivating, encouraging teaching environment and avoiding the semantic barriers in the communication with the students group, effective cooperation between teacher-student and increased attractiveness of the academic environment can be achieved.

Symptoms of apathy, which affect the orientation towards achieving the goal of graduating from university, are manifested in several ways: emotional (lack of emotional activation, intensity of emotional experiences, emotional responsiveness, unmet emotional feelings), cognitive (diminishing the importance or value attributed to different areas (lack of concern for personal problems, lack of interest) and manifest behavior (absence of initiative, effort, persistence, dependence on other people to structure the activity).

Therefore, in the present study, we advocate the adoption of training strategies and psychological and academic support mechanisms for students, so as to emphasize the formative nature of the educational process.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Didactic communication and academic success

Success is, in the context of psycho-pedagogical communication, when the teacher becomes more conscious of his students. The transmitted message undergoes coding and decoding processes that ensure that it enters the vocabulary of both the teacher and the student as they have the opportunity to become both transmitter and receiver in turn. Thus, in the process of communication, the exchanges of messages are divided into two main categories: semantic messages, ie information, knowledge, and the second group is represented by ectosemantic messages, namely attitudes and beliefs. Summing up the above, it is a well-known fact that learning is done through and for communication, ultimately being an act of communication.

Of great importance are the facilitators or disruptors of persuasive communication. According to M. Bromberg (Zlate, 2006, p. 304), persuasion is influenced by:

- characteristics of the persuasive source (credibility, attractiveness, power to distribute or not rewards and punishments);
- message characteristics (unilateral or bilateral messages, structure and type of message);
- receptor characteristics (especially related to some mental processes and mechanisms that come into operation during the persuasive process: attention, understanding, acceptance, memorization, action).

It is also very important to have the receiver on guard, against persuasive intent or against the content of the message - both of which can lead to the phenomenon of resistance to change.

2.2. Possible barriers to communication

In the way of communication, a variety of barriers may arise that can oppose the positive end of the communication process. Among the barriers encountered in communication, we can count:

- language barriers that are manifested in the same words but have distinct meanings for different people;
- the receiver and the transmitter can have different training and experience;
- the emotional state of one of the two may influence the meaning of the message;
- preconceived and routine ideas can influence receptivity;
- difficulty of expressing from the emitter; the use of confusing words or phrases by the transmitter.

A second series of barriers identified by L. Saules are environmental barriers such as inappropriate working climate (high noise pollution); use of inappropriate informational media. The position of the transmitter and receiver in communication may also constitute a barrier because of: the image of the transmitter or the receiver about itself and about the interlocutor; different characterization by the transmitter and receiver of the situation in which communication takes place; feelings and intentions with which the interlocutors participate in the communication process.

Along with the above barriers, barriers of conception can also arise: the existence of assumptions; clumsy expression of the message by the emitter; hasty conclusions on the message; lack of interest of the receiver towards the message and routine in the communication process. (Tran & Stanciugel, 2003)

In addition to these barriers identified by L. Saules who are in the way of communication, we can speak in the case of psycho-pedagogical communication and barriers such as verbal deficiencies, the length of the meeting, the vocabulary, the fear of mistakes, the tongue, the fatigue of the students. Even though these barriers are unpleasant in communication, they have often led to improvement, to optimizing communication, not to diminishing its effectiveness.

For a clearer improvement of the psycho-pedagogical communication process there are a number of techniques in teacher-student communication. The teacher should take into account the students' learning style and focus on the fact that each student is unique and has an individual learning style. In this case, good communication begins by knowing the wishes and wishes of the individuals concerned, in our case the students, for a better review of the communication strategy. As soon as the teacher has the necessary knowledge about his students, he will know how to combine the front and group activities, as it is well known that the student has a high return when cooperating, so the teacher knowing each student's learning standard, will certainly know what teams can form in the class so they are as balanced as possible and the result is an effective pedagogical communication based on cooperation and tolerance, not on competition. More interesting than that, another technique may be active listening, in this way the teacher attaches great

importance to the student's opinion, the student can feel appreciated for what has been said and encouraged, and the communication process proves to be successful.

What is well to remember and apply in the act of psycho-pedagogical communication is the emphasis we put on nonverbal communication, thus paving the way for the verbal message and giving the student the sense of importance of the content proposed by the teacher, transmitted at the same time with the verbal message. Thus, complex, non-verbal and verbal communication can be achieved, combining in a harmonious way, verbally through explanations and non-verbal, through gestures and mimics.

There must be a permanent communication between the teacher and the student, the communication must have a beginning but never an end, ie in order to maintain the student's interest in the act of communication, but especially in the learning process, there must be a permanent interaction between the two actors of the process, in which the teacher, following the feedback received from the students, is to review his methodology by applying interactive working methods to develop the student's willingness to cope alone, but also gain an interest in future actions. A teacher should not focus on memorizing or accurately relaying the lessons, but on the creativity, criticism and the creative way the student has on the teachings.

There are students who do not have enough confidence in their personal ability, who are shy and undecided, that can not get sufficiently involved in their tasks. They require a pedagogical tactful intervention to increase self-confidence. At the level of the person-receiver (students) there may be situations of inattention, apathy, rumors, disturbing phenomena that can be removed by a firm attitude from the teacher, but with attention and respect for the students, otherwise if in the teacher-student communication relationship does not have a proper affective charge, students can show attitudes of withdrawal, avoidance, even opposition.

Other disturbances occur in teaching due to the teacher. There are teachers who do not respect the teaching principles, such as the principle of accessibility.

Experiences are unique to each teacher, being always intertwined in a different way. Each teacher has a certain image of what it means to be professional and reflective.

The concept of intrapersonal intelligence, implemented by Gardner (2006), is a framework to support the authenticity of the teacher's reflection as it requires a genuine personal response, facilitates planning to improve the use of concentration-based strategies that allow individual approaches to change needed to improve professional practice. This approach Sellars (2012) allows teachers to start from their own experiences and individual perspectives; they take into account these contextual variations and adapt them to the theoretical, professional strategies they have encountered or intend to explore. It validates the time and effort spent in reflection as it allows the planning of optimization actions in order to be able to capitalize on the three essential aspects for teachers: pedagogical knowledge and specialized content; differences between students and the preferences of the community they belong to; an understanding of the self and the personal potential that each must have to improve their professional practice and initiate and support change.

2.3. Reflective practice - premise and outcome of the instructive-educational process

An effective teacher is a reflexive teacher. Reflexivity is the process of critical examination of one's own experience. Reflexivity appears as a possible predictive factor for academic achievement. Reflexivity

indicates the degree to which a person critically analyzes their own experiences, trying to understand the internal and interpersonal processes that guided their behavior during specific episodes. New evidence suggests that high levels of reflexivity are associated with improved psychological functioning (Angus et al., 2012; Banham & Schweitzer, 2017).

A reflexive conversation facilitates the realization of meanings, the emergence of new perspectives and the reconstruction of narratives about oneself and others. Reflexive conversations are seen as predictors of change (Angus & McLeod, 2004). Just as reflexive therapeutic conversations provide therapists and clients with a room for therapeutic change (Havens, 1996), therapists thus succeed in encouraging their clients to reveal specific and detailed narratives of their lives (narrative episodes) in order to help them to understand the psychological processes that influence their behavior (Angus, Levitt, & Hardtke, 1999), and the teacher can also encourage students to reflect on their own mental approach, thus developing metacognitive capacities.

More elements appear in the reflexive practice:

- reflection is generated by the phenomenon, occurring in everyday professional activity;
- understanding the phenomenon in reflection (when the impact is strong and there is need of a reflection at the end of the day);
- the functioning of the thought process is the step in the awareness and separation power of thoughts;
- action, meaning that interpretations occur and thus we can change our beliefs about our behaviors.

The student needs to have a mentor to increase the efficiency of reflective practice. Reflective practice correlates with a better desire, lack of motivation, polite skepticism towards the ideas and actions of others. The change must start from within so that we can make change on the outside. Even if the interior is often confused, authentic learning helps to change it.

3. Research Questions

The phenomenon of declining motivation is present in many Romanian universities. What are the causes? What can we do? How can we intervene as teachers and mediators of the instructive-educational process? Does the training and the development of reflexive capacity be associated with the progress of the awareness and improvement of the academic learning process? A teacher-student communication focusing on emotional bondage may end up with improved academic performance.

All these are questions that we are trying to answer in this study.

4. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the experiment were as follows:

- O1 - Identify general / characteristic features of effective and authentic teacher-student relationship, based on partnership in self-training, emotional involvement and deep engagement;
- O2 - the use of teaching and learning techniques and methods focused on reflective communication;
- O3 - identification of progress achieved through experimental approach..

5. Research Methods

The research methods we used were the questionnaire survey, psycho-pedagogical observation and the psychological experiment. The questionnaire we made contained varied items, both with closed responses and open responses. The students were asked to express their opinion on a scale marked with numerical values from 1 to 5 (1 – “not at all”; 2 – “to a very small extent”; 3 - “to a small extent”; 4 - “great measure”; 5 - “to a great extent”).

The questions regarded the subject’s opinion on: students’ perceptions and expectations about the teaching process in general and about the relationship with the teacher in particular, the collaboration with the teacher, authentic communication based on spiritual warmth, the importance of affective connection with the teacher on their self-confidence and their academic performance.

Our sample of subjects was made up of 88 Masters students from the Faculty of Letters, in the second year (Level II), enrolled in the Psycho-pedagogical Training Program for Certification for the Didactic, in the Didactic Staff Training Department, the University of Craiova.

The experiment was a classic one, ensuring from the beginning identical conditions between the two samples (experimental and control), naturally, because the challenge of the changes was realized in the natural, ordinary (class / group of students) educational context.

In our experimental approach the following categories of variables were outlined:

Essential Independent Variable: the educational program designed to develop a stimulating type teacher-student communication, characterized by: warmth, empathy, reflexivity.

This program consists of the following actions:

- *Organizing communication-oriented training situations. Conversational, collaborative and non-directional student-student conversations can generate, on the part of students, an initiative, an active reception and personal involvement in the learning process;*
 - *determining a motivated engagement of students in the study by positively influencing self-esteem, beliefs and beliefs about one's own self (Self-concept);*
 - *engaging and asserting the reflexive-metacognitive capability.*
- *Dependent variables* refer to recorded results

As the products of the learning process, the skills, abilities, and non-cognitive dimensions of personality are much more important than the amount of knowledge acquired.

As such, we considered that following our experiment, the student should say:

a) cognitive capacities:

- *the ability to understand the essence of the themes addressed;*
- *the ability to understand your own thoughts, inner feelings and attitudes (metacognition);*
- *the ability to express one's own feelings in relation to oneself and in relation to others;*
- *empathic capacity.*

b) attitudinal and behavioral changes:

- *intrinsic motivation for learning;*
- *confidence in the teacher;*
- *confidence;*
- *involvement in teaching.*

Another research method we used was the evaluation test. In developing this evaluation test, we focused on those cognitive capacities and attitudinal-behavioral changes that have been pursued throughout our research.

6. Findings

6.1. Comparative data between the experimental group and the control group during the pretest

The comparative analysis of the results obtained by the two samples in the pretest stage was made on the basis of the main criteria for validating hypotheses for the present research: *the ability to surprise the essence, the ability to understand one's own thoughts, inner feelings and attitudes; the ability to express genuine feelings in relation to oneself and in relation to others; empathic capacity; intrinsic motivation for knowledge; trust in the teacher, but also in oneself, involvement in didactic activity.*

In the pretest stage, the results of the administered sample show the existence of differences between the two groups (experimental and control). Following statistical inference processing, it was found that these are not statistically significant at a threshold $p < .0$ (Table 01)

Table 01. Average Values for the Pretest

Sample	understanding the essence of the themes addressed	understanding their own thoughts, inner feelings and attitudes	authentic expression of their own feelings	empathy
Ecpretest	3.52	2.08	1.80	3.47
Eepretest	3.02	1.87	1.92	3.8

Neither behavioral attitudinal changes were significant in the pretest, on the experimental or the control group, as illustrated.

6.2. Comparisons in the posttest between the experimental group and the posttest test group

As a result of the experimental approach in the post-test phase, we compared the results of the experimental group and the control group by reference to the following criteria and indicators: *cognitive capacities* (the ability to understand the essence of the themes approached, the ability to understand their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes, the ability to express one's own feelings in relation to oneself and in relation to others, empathic capacity); *attitudinal-behavioral changes* (intrinsic motivation for learning, teacher trust, self-confidence, involvement in didactic activity).

For the results of the evaluation test applied to the Psychology of Education, the averages obtained for the two groups are different (Table 02) for all the analyzed indicators, the subjects from the experimental group achieving better results.

Table 02. Average values for the posttest

Sample	understanding the essence of the themes addressed	understanding their own thoughts, inner feelings and attitudes	authentic expression of their own feelings	empathy
Eposttest	4.30	1.93	3.60	1.71
Eposttest	4.98	2.55	4.71	2.51

Regarding attitudinal behavioral changes in the post-test phase, attitudinal and behavioral changes are recorded: for the subjects in the experimental group, the mean values obtained were higher compared to those in the control group (Table 03):

Table 03. Average values for attitudinal-behavioral changes in the post-test phase

Sample	intrinsic motivation for learning	confidence in the teacher	confidence in oneself	involvement in teaching
Eposttest	3.55	3.63	3.03	3.30
Eposttest	4.23	4.16	3.81	3.93

7. Conclusion

The data obtained at both cognitive and attitudinal - behavioral levels lead to the conclusion of a successful intervention. The analysis and interpretation of the data provided by the experiment group comparisons - in the pretest-posttest and pretest-posttest comparisons for each group, revealed some conclusions regarding the hypotheses of the research:

- with the systematic use of strategies centered on reflective teaching and stimulating communication, significant advances in cognitive and metacognitive capacities have been achieved;

- the participation of the students in the activities of the experimental program has led to positive changes of the self-confidence levels: at self-confidence level, significant changes can occur if systematic affective-attitudinal didactic strategies are applied;

- another outlined conclusion refers to the positive changes registered in the intrinsic motivation: at the level of the intrinsic motivation, the experimental sample registered a statistically significant improvement, while the progress of the subjects of the control group is reduced compared to the experimental group and are not statistically significant; when it is insisted on the development of cognitive and metacognitive factors, but also on the development of self-confidence, the subjects become aware of their own mental approach in learning, they are aware of the importance of responsible involvement in their own formation / development process, gain more confidence in itself. If at the beginning of the experimental program the extrinsic reasons (*example of the people around, the appreciation of teachers, colleagues and parents*), the posttest revealed *the intrinsic reasons (curiosity, pleasure to learn new information, new, difficult problems that have to be solved)*.

References

- Angus, L. E., Levitt, H., Hardtke, K. (1999). The narrative processes coding system: Research applications and implications for psychotherapy practice. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55(10), 1255–1270. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4679\(199910\)55:10<1255::AID-JCLP7>3.0.CO;2-F](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(199910)55:10<1255::AID-JCLP7>3.0.CO;2-F)

- Angus, L. E., McLeod, J. (2004). Towards an integrative framework for understanding the role of narrative in the psychotherapy process. In L. Angus & J. McLeod (Eds.), *Handbook of narrative and psychotherapy: Practice, theory and research*, (pp. 367–374). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Angus, L. E., Lewin, J., Boritz, T., Bryntwick, E., Carpenter, N., Watson-Gaze, J., Greenberg, L. (2012). Narrative processes coding system: A dialectical constructivist approach to assessing client change processes in emotion-focused therapy of depression. *Research in Psychotherapy: Psychopathology, Process and Outcome*, 15(2), 54–61. <https://doi.org/10.4081/ripppo.2012.105>
- Banham, J. A., Schweitzer, R. D. (2017). Therapeutic conversations: Therapists' use of observational language contributes to optimal therapeutic outcomes. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 90(3), 264–278. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12108>
- Gardner, H. (2006). *Inteligențe multiple. Noi orizonturi [Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons]*. București: Editura Sigma.
- Havens, L. L. (1996). *A safe place. Laying the groundwork of psychotherapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sellars, M. (2012). Teachers and change: The role of reflective practice. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 55, 461 – 469. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812039870>, accesat în 10.12.2017
- Tran, V., Stănciugelu, I. (2003). *Teoria comunicării. [Communication theory]*. București: Editura Facultății de Comunicare și Relații Publice “David Ogilvy”.
- Zlate, M. (2006). *Fundamentele psihologiei [Fundamentals of Psychology]*. București: Editura Universitară.