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COMMUNICATION BEYOND THE LECTURE ROOM AS A CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION IN THE MODERN ERA

Abstract

Modern higher education, in which the student takes more central role, means meeting the various challenges by teachers. The focus of this paper is communication challenges on the relation teacher - students. Strict distance between teachers on the one hand and the students on the other are replaced by more common and increased communication that meets the needs of today's time where the inflow and outflow of information highlights the need for dynamic interaction. In this context practical work with students is an exceptional opportunity to improve communication with teachers and motivating them for greater success and learning the subject matter.

The paper is based on analysis of the impact of practical work of students upon their motivation and improves the level of communication with the professor. The case study refers to students of journalism and public relations at the Law Faculty of the University "Goce Delchev" - Stip. The aim of the research was to realize the impact of practical work on improving communication between the teacher and students.

The results showed that the application of theory to practice strengthened the confidence of students, respect for the professor, bear active communication interaction with the professor, increase motivation of students and result in their greater involvement and commitment to studying.

Keywords: communication, practical work, motivation.

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1. Introduction

The manner of communication between teachers and students has a lot of influence in the process of teaching, during lectures, exercises, but primarily on the way students will master the material in terms of understanding and learning it, and will be able to independently apply the gained knowledge. A frequently asked question is how to know whether the student really understood and learned the material on a particular subject? Is it enough to pass the test, exam, to present a prepared paper assignment for the professor to obtain a complete picture of the student's understanding of the material? One of the ways to answer this question is to put students in the role of "workers" who have to demonstrate practically what they have learned, i.e. to apply what they have learned in practice. Namely, law students should write an application, appeal or complaint, the student in Business Management should prepare a business plan, a student of computer science and programming should make a computer program, a student of journalism should write and publish an article in a newspaper, etc.

This manner of mutual practical work between teacher and students, during which they will be working on the development of a product or service, creates an entirely different situation in which certain stereotypes about the way of communication in the teacher – student relationship are lost. In fact, coming out of a classroom on the field, where the challenge of applying theory to practice lies, creates a natural situation in which you find students really executing of tasks in the future profession they have chosen. Perhaps not every theoretically derived teaching unit and not every object that is based strictly on learning theory can clearly be applied in practice, but either way, most, if not really, at least virtually can be simulated to see the practical applicability of what was learned. What is thus particularly important and it is in response to the communication challenges of modern times is that the practical realization of theory, with the involvement of the teachers and students, opens new dimensions of communication that goes far beyond the lecturing and listening, and turns in

conversation, negotiation, consultation, suggestions, giving and accepting new ideas and their realization.

The aim of this case study, which is a pilot research, is to realize the impact of practical work on improving communication between the teacher and students. The study involved 30 students of Journalism and Public Relations at the Law Faculty of the University “Goce Delchev”, Stip.

The basic hypothesis is that communication between teachers and students outside the usual framework of a classroom, specifically with practical work through which a product is developed by applying the theory in practice, result in increased levels of communication between teachers and students; an additional incentive and motivation for regular class attendance, as well as commitment and increased activity during the lectures. The rule that good communication is a prerequisite for any successful operation can be reflected in education and it can be noted that good communication between teacher and students is a prerequisite to love, understand and learn the subject.

One of the ways this paper researches, is raising the level of communication through practical work of the professor with students. Thus, what this paper considers as practical work is the activity that is carried out of the classic classroom and which consists of a series of tasks whose execution contributes to the forming and producing a particular product or service. In this particular case, which is to be discussed, it is a journalistic product – a newspaper. Through the manner of its creation, this paper discusses the new levels of communication that were opened between the professor and the students.

2. Practice as communication technique

Communication techniques that teachers use during lectures play a significant role in the way students will become receptive to the subject they are learning. Aids such as presentations, posters, listening and watching videos as communication means

through which certain matters are closer to the students, certainly have a great importance in learning the subject. Their choice depends on the opportunities available, the situation, but also on the subject that is being taught. The more appropriately the means to communicate the theory with students are chosen, the more successfully it will be comprehended by them. Accordingly, "communication is competent, which means of high quality, when it is both appropriate and effective for the particular situation", (Morreale, Spitzberg, & Barge, 2006, cited in Morreale, 2007:7). "Appropriate communication means that you act in ways suitable to the norms and expectations of the context and situation in which you find yourself. Effective communication means you are able to achieve the most desirable objectives or outcomes in the context", (Morreale, 2007:7). According to Morreale, in order to communicate competently, there are three basic requirements you must meet:

- First, you must be motivated to communicate competently.
- Second, you must be knowledgeable about the situation in which you are communicating and the kind of communication expected and needed in that situation.
- Third, you must be skilled at actually sending and receiving messages in that particular situation.

"These three requirements or dimensions of competence – motivation, knowledge, and skills – are the foundation of competent communication whether you are in an interpersonal situation, a group, public speaking, or even in a mass communication context such as on television or in a mediated context like using e-mail" (ibid.).

But what is it that enables practical work with students from a communicational point of view? First, daily communication among the professor and students about what they are working on. The once a week two-hour communication during lectures becomes ordinary. E-mail and Facebook communication, in a group or individually, are imposed as necessary if we want to successfully and timely complete the practical task. Thus the barriers that create uncertainty in students are increasingly removed because they are in a situation where they need to decide what to work on and how to work on

it. Moreover, they shouldn't restrict themselves at any time to ask and consult the professor for certain dilemmas or problems.

A confirmation for this is the example involving the student newspaper "Students ECHO", which the students majoring in Journalism and public relations at the Law Faculty of the University "Goce Delchev" - Stip started preparing during the winter semester in the academic year 2011/2012. The whole idea and its realization proved to be an excellent technique for communicating with students about the subject matter in the field of journalism. Moreover, from a communicational standpoint three components were significant:

- One - to increase communication with the professor;
- Second – to vividly communicate the theory and apply it through practical execution;
- The third - to create a new situation in which you will encourage students' will and preparedness to communicate (willingness to communicate).

The latter, in the context of the views of McCroskey and Richmond, who emphasize: "Whether a person is willing to communicate with another person in a given interpersonal encounter is certainly affected by situational constraints. Many situational variables can have an impact... Willingness to communicate is probably to a major degree situationally dependent. Nevertheless, individual exhibit regular willingness-to-communicate tendencies across situations", (McCroskey, Richmond, 1987:129).

2.1 Practical work in terms of increasing communication

The paper was created as a result of becoming aware of the need for larger participation on behalf of the students and their encouragement of a more liberated and enhanced communication - among each other as fellow students as well as with the professor. A very important moment was their liberation in communication with third parties, because the journalist profession itself or a person for public relations has communication in its essence. As it is noted in theory, "the journalist is a carrier of the

mischievous researching spirit, mind and heart, with the trait to speak, to talk, to write and to read, to listen and to be heard, to see and be seen!" (Andrevski, 1994:29).

An incentive for the newspaper was the perceived inertia among students during lectures. They were quiet, peaceful, with no apparent self-initiative and creativity. All these attributes are uncommon for the journalistic profession which requires openness, communication and, above all, great creativity. There was the impression that students come to lectures and go, during which one could not feel the feedback from them regarding the comprehension of the material. More specifically, despite the peace and order during the lectures, the feeling after their ending was that the taught theory rang someplace across the walls of the classroom. What was lacking was a true two-way communication and feedback information that what they understood in theory, they could also really apply in practice. Moreover, it was also taken in consideration that these are subjects that need to enable them to enter into the journalistic profession, they are key subjects of journalism that explore the journalistic genres, the fundamentals of journalism and the way of functioning and operation of the print and electronic media, editorial policy in media etc.

Practical tasks during classes and exercises - writing news, report, coverage - showed serious divergence among the learned theory and its practical application. A sign that pointed out that it is necessary to undertake urgent action to wake the "sleeping beauties full of knowledge" syndrome. This knowledge should have been learned and one should know how to apply it! There was a need to establish a different kind of communication, communication outside the classroom, which can be done only through the practical work on a specific journalistic product. If we continued with work assignments during class, during the exercises, it would have been a simultaneous situation that is being assessed by the teacher. It was necessary to truly act - to form a real newsroom, write, edit and publish journalistic texts which will be assessed not only by professors, but also from the public. To be a real reporter during the studies! To learn from experience! To experience dealing with searching for a popular topic, searching for interlocutors, writing texts that will be released to the public, with returning of texts, the struggle to release / publish a text, the struggle for rows in the

text, equipping the text, making headlines, subheadings, searching for photos, and finally, the greatest feeling- signing one's name under the completed text. All of these activities inevitably encouraged students to regular active communication - with each other and with the professor. Communication in which will not be just passive recipients, but active communicators as well.

3. Student newspaper

Even with the mentioning of the idea of preparing a student newspaper there was movement among the students, they started asking questions, giving ideas for the name of the paper, ideas for columns in the paper, the choice of chief editor, deputy editor, and editors for sections. A complete turnaround in the behavior of the students! From passive recipients of information they became active providers of information. They interpreted, talked, and exchanged ideas, discussed. It was as if they have suddenly awoken and wished to show and share all the hidden creativity, with each other and with the professor.

A newsroom for the newspaper was formed, whose seat was at the premises of the University UGD FM radio. The chosen name was "Students ECHO". In the first issue of the newspaper, the students wrote: "The newspaper's name was inspired by the sound that does not stop and spreads across the distance – the echo – which reaches everywhere without obstacles and barriers."

In the newsroom of the newspaper, the students had their own separate roles: chief editor, deputy chief editor, editors, and journalists. Departments were formed in the newsroom, sections in the newspaper: education, culture, sports, entertainment, ... Each, according to their interest, chose a particular section. The work was professional, guided by the principles of objectivity and impartiality. Student journalists also followed the technical and graphic preparation of the paper, taking it to print, until his departure.

In the process of drafting / writing / shaping of one text, students passed all stages: selecting the form of a text - whether it will be news, reports, interviews, reportage. Contacting the interviewee; interviewing or taking statements; making a

survey among citizens; recording with a tape recorder; downloading the recorded and selecting the important from the irrelevant... Equipping the text with a title composition, headline, title, subheading, captions, snippet, searching additional photos, writing legends of photos ... Each text passed its road – from the reporter, to the editor, to the editor in chief. If something was missing, it was returned for its completion. There was no room for improvisation. "We are being released in public, we have responsibility for every written word in the texts in the newspaper," one of the students told everyone - the newspaper editor – to his colleagues. Responsibility, commitment and enthusiasm that a professor can only wish for! In circumstances where the final deadline for receiving texts was known, when they knew in advance the agreed date for delivery of the newspaper in print. In the work actively took part students from first, second and third year. The third year students had a leading role. All doubts about what the texts would be like, if the work is done on time, whether the paper will be good enough to give it a "green light" for its printing and publishing - disappeared. What we could see was constructivism, teamwork, sharing ideas, negotiating, having the help from the "more experienced" (those in third year) colleagues to the first and second year.

The first issue of the newspaper came out in December 2011. In the Editorial of the first issue they explained that "the paper is a product of the knowledge obtained during their studies and it represents a blend of creativity, ideas, beliefs and perceptions of the students majoring in Journalism and public relations."

4. Communication without barriers

The practical work on the newspaper also set new ways to communicate with the professor. It was not enough to communicate during lectures. Preparing and publishing a newspaper requires additional communication, additional efforts outside of classes and exercises. At first the students were embarrassed to call on the phone, send an email, send a message through Facebook and did that with a lot of apologies for "disturbing" me. After a while they realized that all these new forms of communication that they were not used to are not disturbances, but necessary forms if we want to

get the newspaper out in time, for it to be precise, with accurate information, objective and professional.

"Get rid of the prejudices, stereotypes, there should be constant communication between us and communication with the teacher to resolve any dilemma and professionally perform journalistic tasks. We cannot make a good newspaper if we don't have good communication between us," one of the students told his colleagues urging them to remove all the communication barriers that restrict their initiative and their creativity.

What followed was a period of contacting everyday by phone, email, Facebook. The professor was no longer just a professor, but was part of the editorial board, and editor in chief, and a journalist, who was always available to editors and reporters from the student newspaper. The questions and consultations became everyday dynamics that was dictated by the students themselves, interested and invested into the practical engagement.

On Facebook, the students formed a group through which each student gave ideas for texts, they gave comments and suggestions. Naturally, the professor was in the group, where communication was informal, relaxed, without strict distance, free from any pressure of the classroom as a template. It was shown that getting out of the classroom and the application of this method of communication, also increased the initiative and creativity of students. One of the elements of the structure of "I" is the different roles we play in social relations or in communication (Trček, 1994:70).

With the newspaper it was as if students got out of a specific framework of the role they had in the classroom and began a completely different role and communication which was much closer to the role that as journalists they will have while working in their future profession. They showed their creative spirit, the one that was taught in the theory: they were persistent, curious, open to change, new experiences, knowledge, internally motivated, with a good sense of humor.

The overall work and commitment on the paper "Students ECHO" - from its preparation to its publishing - had excellent results. First and foremost, students were placed in the real role of professional journalists. An additional incentive was the

feedback they received for every written text - requests for additions, clarifications, taking additional statements, cutting the text, pointing to the incompleteness of certain information, its precision, pointing out possibly biased opinions or inconsistency, the structure of the journalistic text, the language, the need of snippets, documenting the text with photos etc.

What followed was the release of the second issue of the newspaper (March 2012). Then, with just 2 numbers of the "Students ECHO", the students commented with delight: "Professor, we became recognizable!" This further affected their motivation and commitment that increased not only when it came to the newspaper, but it was evident during the classes with increased interaction, participation, asking questions, topics for discussion, debating and expressing their own views.

We continued with the third issue of the newspaper (June 2012), the fourth and so on, according to the planned dynamics, continuously every three months during the school year - December, March, June. The latest issue came out in June 2013. The texts were evaluated, every following issue was compared to the preceding one, the students themselves have witnessed their progress in writing and agreed that every issue is better than the previous one, although they admitted the first will remain their favorite!

4.1 Impressions and comments

After the completion of the first issue of the newspaper, the students were able to write their experiences and impressions. Some of them are the following:

- "I received a lot of knowledge from the lectures during classes, however I was able to comprehend the material much easier through the work on the newspaper. Somehow, it came to me as a "putting in function" what I have learned. And while working on the newspaper, I had a strange feeling: it was as if I was suddenly studying and taking the exam before myself. "
- "I perceived the professor as being much closer. It was very different than in the classroom. Somehow closer, more immediate, it was

somehow like the professor was more of 'a human, from flesh and blood', with whom I can converse more freely. "

- "I feel that my initiative got more expressed. I didn't even know that I have that kind of creativity in myself. "

- "Out of the classroom, in the newsroom I function better. The space limitation that the classroom makes is lost. Not only physical limitations, but more in terms of the distance between a teacher and student. The space in the newsroom of the newspaper was also limited, one can even say that the newsroom was smaller than the classroom, but the distance 'depreciated, melted' and I was able to communicate easier. "

- "It was very important to me that I could call the professor at any time. I knew I wasn't going to be misunderstood, and it is all in function of the work. "

- "In the beginning I was under pressure thinking that I will be evaluated by the professor and the public, but then I realized that the professor only helps me to be evaluated positively by the public."

- "Some of the students from other majors could not understand how I could communicate with the professor via Facebook. They were puzzled when I told them that during the weekend we were constantly online so that the newspaper gets released on time. I think that when I brought them our published newspaper they realized that it was about professional commitment and communication which I have to say they even envied. "

- • "We became journalists-beginners even while still studying. I communicated with a lot of people before I wrote the text and now I realize how many new contacts our profession provides. "

- "The greatest benefit of preparing and publishing a newspaper was that I became a real journalist before I even finished university!"

- "There is no better feeling for a journalist than the feeling when you see your own signature and your own first published text! I immediately received calls and congratulations for the newspaper from a few friends. "

The comments of the students were real confirmation of the success of the entire project in which, on one hand, theory was applied successfully in practice, and on the other hand communication between students and teachers, and vice versa, rose at a much higher level, initiating new ways of successful and positive two-way communicational action.

5. Conclusion

Communication with students is a challenge for any professor who has a set goal before himself/herself for students to comprehend and master the material, his/her subject to not become the "fear and trembling" to students, but to be understood, learned and accordingly for the professor to receive the epithet of being the favorite. In fact, there is no subject which in itself is fear and terror. From the attitude of the professor himself/herself, the manner of his/her teaching and communicating with the students, it depends on whether the students will have an aversion towards a particular subject or if it will be favored by them.

The modern era of developed communication technology requires new ways of communicating with students. The stereotype of a professor behind a desk in the classroom and students who obediently sit and listen is slowly being exceeded. Practical work with students gives the opportunity for a different kind of communication, more intense, more immediate. Certainly this requires a lot of dedication and time, but the feedback we receive from students only confirms the theory of Schramm that communication can be complete only if the fields of experience of the sender and the recipient overlap, i.e. only when the recipient receives and understands the message in the meaning desired by the sender, which depends on the level of similarity / difference of his/her field of experience with that of the sender. The larger the overlap of the fields of experience of the communicators is the more common experience they have and can understand each other better (Dzamtovska-Zdravkovska, 2012). In the specific case explained in this paper, the common experience of the professor and students results in the following:

- Increasing the level of communication between professor and students;
- Greater willingness to communicate;
- Increasing the self-esteem and the confidence (the quiet and peaceful students are transformed into energetic, initiative-taking and creative people who boldly stated their thoughts on the situations in various areas of social life; asked for everything that might have been unclear in the lectures; entered debates,

discussions on various current issues; analyzed and made comparisons between theory in journalistic subjects and practical work of the media);

- Maximum engagement in learning the theory (as students themselves wrote in the editorial in the first issue of the newspaper "theory without its application is often known to float in the air ...");
- Additional incentive and motivation for regular class attendance, as well as commitment and increased activity during the lectures.

It can be concluded that the practical work on creating a product associated with the subject teaching can give birth to different and new ways of communication with the professor and among students, and presents an exceptional opportunity to establish an active relationship in the communication process, in which the roles of the sender and the recipient of information will simultaneously change as one of the important prerequisites for successful communication.

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