

VALUES-FORMING TEACHING TASKS. AN ANALYSIS AND EXEMPLIFICATION

Abstract

The following article, "Values-forming teaching tasks. An analysis and exemplification", by Master in Sciences, Assistant Professor Miguel A. Olivé Iglesias, presents an analysis and contextualization of the term teaching task as well as an exemplification of values-forming teaching tasks proposed by the author for the development of values in beginners working with the Spectrum series. Thus, this article focuses on a general approximation to the term, to move on to introduce the term above mentioned and to present arguments which speak in their favor as a powerful tool to transform the ways of thinking and behaving of the individuals --a must in today's educational trends-- besides developing the elements which have been traditionally inherent in the teaching-learning process. Also, an analysis of the potentials of the materials the teacher has at hand, namely the Spectrum series and the so-called communicative approach, is introduced, and as an illustration and contribution are given examples of teaching tasks to develop values and how to put them in practice within a lesson.

Título: Tareas docentes para la formación de valores. Análisis y ejemplificación

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Sumario

El artículo "Values-forming teaching tasks. An analysis and exemplification" (Tareas docentes para la formación de valores. Análisis y ejemplificación), presentado por el Master en Ciencias, profesor Asistente Miguel A Olivé Iglesias, presenta un análisis y contextualización del término tarea docente, así como una ejemplificación de tareas docentes para la formación de valores propuesto por el autor para trabajar con estudiantes de 1er año por medio de la serie Spectrum. Se realiza una aproximación general al término, y luego se presentan las tareas docentes para formar valores y argumentas que las sustentan como un instrumento poderoso para transformar las formas de pensar y actuar de los individuos, algo fundamental en las tendencias educativas actuales. Además se presentan elementos propios del proceso docente, y se realiza un análisis de la potencialidad de los materiales con que cuenta el profesor concretamente: la serie Spectrum y el enfoque comunicativo. Como contribución ilustrativa se presentan ejemplos de tales tareas docentes para formar valores, y cómo implementarlas en clases.

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this article is to present an analysis and contextualization of the term teaching task as well as an exemplification of tasks, values-forming teaching tasks, proposed by the author for the development of values in beginners working with the Spectrum series.

A reading of materials on the matter, teaching tasks, has led the author to conclude that most of the analyses, proposals, exemplifications and concrete implementations of teaching tasks in the teaching-learning process have centered on the cognitive area (Concepción, 1989; Garcés, 1997)(*). That is, learning the contents and developing the abilities included in a syllabus have been the key volume to be activated with a group of teaching tasks.

This notion -- never absolute-- has been corroborated by interviews with specialists who have majored in the field (**), their criterion being that the affective domain, though sometimes implicit, has not been entirely or systematically explored and exploited towards a values education.

Teaching tasks have been much employed to develop logical thinking, creative thinking, processes of generalization of thought and formation of concepts (Rodríguez Devesa, 2001), some of which pave the basis for an attempt to educate in values. Yet tasks specifically aimed at developing values do not enjoy a common presence in the constant doing and researching of professors.

Thus, this article focuses on a general approximation to the term, to move on to introduce the term values-forming teaching tasks and to present arguments which speak in their favor as a powerful tool to transform the ways of thinking and behaving of the individuals --a must in today's educational trends-- besides developing the elements which have been traditionally inherent in the teaching-learning process. Also, an analysis of the potentials of the materials the teacher has at hand, namely the Spectrum series and the so-called communicative approach, is introduced, and as an illustration and contribution are given examples of teaching tasks to develop values and how to put them in practice within a lesson.

(*) Taken from Rodríguez Devesa, 2001

(**) Interview with M.Sc. Rafael Rodríguez Devesa. Assistant Professor of the ISPH. He has published articles on teaching tasks, the core of his Master's Degree Thesis were these too, and he is currently working on his Doctoral Thesis, which deals with teaching tasks as well.

DEVELOPMENT

1. An Analysis of the Term

A reviewing of bibliography on teaching tasks shows that the most frequently used terms are tasks, teaching tasks, cognitive tasks, didactical tasks, professional tasks and pedagogico-professional tasks.

Such diversity of nomenclature is not a problem in itself. It must be stated, however, that an assistance are their problematic contents, which serve as the basis for their classification, as well as the key goals set for attaining specific results. This assures that the name of the task reflects what is wanted from the student, and that such task leads to the resolution of a problem.

D.M Grichin refers to these as **teaching tasks**, subdividing them in:

- **Cognitive** (result, unknown; resolution means, partially known)
- **Practical** (result, previously known; resolution means, unknown)
- **Creative** (result, unknown; resolution means, unknown)

María Rita Concepción proposes two types of tasks:

- **Exercises** (an orientation is given on what is to be done to find a solution)
- **Problems** (a situation is provided so that the student solves it) (Concepción, 1989).

Here we assume the second type of task given its characteristics and its relation with the system to be proposed in this article. In the resolution of the situation posed the student uses the means he has, devises new ones on the platform of what is already known to him and presents a solution that responds to the objectives of the task given. The first type is implied in the second, as there can be no doing in class without a proper orientation of what is to be done.

Garcés Acilio (1997) includes the function that is played by the tasks within the teaching-learning system:

- **Preparatory tasks.** Those which create the basis for learning the contents included in the tasks
- **Formative tasks.** Those which lead to the grasping of the essential traits of specific contents
- **Developing tasks.** Those which allow to establish relations and give the tools for problem-solving approaches

There is a sequential implication in this classification, as the tasks are meant to prepare the student, give him the essences of the phenomena under analysis, and then lead them to face situations with the tools to solve these.

A. Pidkasisti proposes **Cognitive Tasks** and divides them in:

- Model tasks: they help exact habits and skills by memory-drilling reproduction
- Reproductive tasks: the student reproduces the knowledge acquired and its structure and gets ready to apply them in new situations

- Productive tasks: the student acquires new information on the object under analysis and adds it to what he already knows. He widens his experience
- Creative tasks: the student applies his knowledge in new situations that demand creativeness. He poses and solves new problems by enriching his own reasoning

Lidia Lara Díaz uses the term **professional tasks**. She states that the professional tasks are those which "are taken from the object of the future profession of the graduate-to-be, and from the role that he must play. It is the type of activity that shows the role of the professional to solve the situations that will come up in the object of his profession within specific context and conditions. Working with these situations will allow the graduate-to-be to acquire means of professional behavior". (Lara, 1995). She also refers to Didactical Tasks, these seen as the actions led by the teacher and performed by the students within the teaching-learning process.

We see this second type as a more general one inside which can be developed the professional ones. The latter ones are also carried out within the process and contain actions oriented by the teacher and performed by the students, only that such actions are aimed at solving simulated professional problems that may occur in the future professional context of the student, and its contents have a developmental connotation in the sense of the preparation of the student from the classroom to face his professional reality in the future.

On the other hand, D.B. Elkonin specifies that the teaching tasks provoke changes in the individual, giving more importance to the process of attainment of the product than to the product itself. We agree with the author's statement: a properly implemented teaching task should bring about transformations in the individual performing the task. In fact, this is one of the contentions of this article: the gradual assimilation of positively-tending attitudes and behaviors in respect to the object of the profession of the students in value-forming activities.

Also for us, the student must labor to attain a result, i.e, give a solution to a problem, and this process of laboring is important as it is founded on the repertoire of knowledge the student uses to get to the end, and gives the possibility of establishing a rapport with the object of the activity. The process and the task have "an emotional character" (Pedagogía, 1984) leading and motivating the student to know more and learn what he does not know. This process builds the foundation for the preparation of the student for his future role. Problem solving "involves not only cognitive but also (...) emotional factors". (D'Amore and Zan, 1996)

The product itself is relevant as it constitutes the platform and guide of action of the graduate once he goes to his practice. The answers provided for the task (the solution given to the simulated problem presented) permit him to carry out a more efficient work and save him time when confronting problems: he will only have to adapt them to the new situations which logically will be richer and far more complex than the ones used in class, but which will have a first opening approximation in what is done in the classroom.

Alvarez de Zayas posits that the teaching task leads to the fulfilment of a goal, to the "resolution of the problem posed to the student by the teacher". He expounds that "the teaching-learning process unfolds from one task to another until the ultimate goal is brought off, that is, until the student behaves adequately (...), it is (the process) a series of situations (...) which will have as nucleus the development of a task, that is to say, the achievement of a goal that implies the gradual transformation of the personality of the graduate-to-be". The same author offers a revealing conception in regards to what is implied in three elements he considers vital to be attained in the formative process:

- The problemic element. "The student must be solving problems most of the time...". "The student is independent when he solves something, creative when he contributes something".
- The communicative element. "Through the process the student should expose, analyze, discuss, value, convince, criticize and selfcriticize".
- The participative element. "...the students participate in the development of the process and their criteria can change the road to follow. This gives them a sense of commitment with the process and put their efforts in achieving it". (Alvarez de Zayas, 1996).

In such wise, the gist of the teaching or professional task is to produce gradual changes in the individual. The professional task is qualified to purport a system of moral and professional values which is inherent in the type of graduate society is intent on forming today.

2. Values-forming Teaching Tasks

Values-forming teaching tasks are proposed as a systemic group of tasks which are carried out by the students within the teaching-learning process (or without it if necessary as independent work) aimed at developing in the student moral and human values, exploiting the materials at hand.

If on one hand there are authors who claim that simulation activities guarantee behaviors, on the other hand, many others too coincide in saying that tasks are a tool for favoring changes in the human personality, consequently serving as facilitators of the regulation of conducts in the student. (Elkonin, Alvarez de Zayas).

One variant of tasks are the so-called professional games, whose definition and inclusion in this field are aptly outlined and aid in the further understanding of the essence of the professional tasks. Professional games are "an imitation of the real world, they set modes of professional action to make and analyze decisions" (MINED, 1988). The goals of these games are still more clarifying:

- Activation of the teaching-learning process to achieve specific objectives:
- * Development of qualities of socialist conscience and behavior
- * Search of solutions to problemic situations

Setting modes of professional action and developing conscience and behavior are fundamental in the conceptions sought after in the professional tasks. The

fact that these games also embark on the preparation of the student to find solutions completes the relevance of the tasks as a tool to bring forth a moral education.

Solving a problem in the tasks assigned facilitates a personal connection with the object of the problem and paves the way for demands of higher outcome: the establishment of patterns of conduct to tackle the situations. We coincide with Penny Ur when saying that solving a problem "is particularly suitable for people who are (...) involved with adolescent education..." (Ur, 1997). Ur proceeds to say that solving a problem "...usually works well producing a high level of participation and motivation; as with many simulation tasks, participants tend to become personally involved: they begin to see the characters as real people and to relate to the problem as an emotional issue as well as an intellectual and moral one". Again the conception of the personal involvement recurs as an important part of the features of the tasks, and is blended with the moral connotation that emerges from the problem being dealt with. The student discovers and develops a moral angle in what he has to do, what also affects his personality and his behavior. Of course, employing these tasks in starting levels is possible by tailoring their demands and exigencies.

"The number, selection, internal gradation of the structures and vocabulary will depend (...) on the social roles of the people in the situation" (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1989). This assertion clarifies that the task could be similar, yet the internal demands from the students may vary according to the factors mentioned, along with others; and emphasizes that it is subjected to the social roles of the participants. The stress on this social conditioning opens way to the goals of the simulated professional tasks: they acquire full intent and sense in this perspective given the fact that their function is to submerge the students in this social role and urge them to act within it. But, as is stated, the exigencies vary as do the ages and level of the students. This must be kept in mind when devising tasks aimed at fostering values through the contents of the syllabus, and proves that this is not impossible nor exclusive for advanced levels.

3. Communicative Functions to Form Values

Within the English lesson are prioritized a series of communicative functions according to its objectives. Functions that refer to the moral and professional angle of the learning of the foreign language are found: Wilkins (1972) includes the category "Moral discipline and Evaluation" and he itemizes it in:

- Judgement (valuation: estimate, value, appreciate, overestimate, prejudge)
- Approval (expression of approval of another's behavior, performance, etc: approve, commend, deserve, merit, give credit)
- Disapproval (expression of disapproval of another's behavior, performance, etc: accuse, condemn, deplore, etc)

He also includes "Suasion", where the following subcategory is suasion (persuade, suggest, advise, recommend, beg, urge). Another author, Van Ek (1980), proposes (among others) the following categories:

Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes:

- expressing satisfaction/dissatisfaction
- expressing sympathy

Expressing and finding out moral attitudes:

- expressing and inquiring about approval or disapproval
- expressing appreciation

Getting things done:

- suggesting a course of action
- requesting, inviting, or advising others to do something
- instructing or directing others to do something

Finocchiaro (1989) considers the following categories:

Personal (where moral, intellectual and social concerns are listed)

Directive (making suggestions, requests; persuading someone to change his point of view)

Imaginative (solving problems)

Such listing of authors demonstrates that working with values (moral, professional, human) is present in the structure of the syllabi, despite the fact that they are not actually fully implemented in the concrete lessons as is required today.

4. The Spectrum Series. An Example of Tasks to Form Values.

The contents of a specific beginners' course can be exploited to stir and form values that emerge from a less-to-more-complex system of tasks. In the Spectrum series there are enough evidences of contents which can be exploited to plant in the students the first elements of critical thinking and evaluative approaches to situations. The treatment would consider the following steps:

1. Detecting values problems in the situations of the contents received by the students. The tasks will put the students to spot such problems in the diversity of situations they are handed out.
2. Identifying which values are affected. They will have to identify and classify which values are treated in the specific context they are dealing with.
3. Assessing the situation in hand and the values which are either present or absent in relation to this situation.

4. Comparing the situation with the positive counterpart, that is, the students will contrast the situations with the positive counterparts that they have in their own reality.
5. Offering variants that modify the antivalues spotted in the situations. That is, they will be asked to offer variants that prove the wrong of the antivalues spotted in the situations, and to depict the values that truly embody a correct behavior before life and people around us.

The tasks enforce levels of affectivity with what is being done and with the people involved in the situations and in the classroom. This includes:

- * **Taking in** (facing that reality, confronting it as it is, appropriating of the elements that conform it)
- * **Recognizing** (identifying oneself with that reality and developing attitudes and conducts towards the resolution of the problems stated)
- * **Valuing** (spotting the wrong values and seeking out the right ones in a process of internalization, discovering the ugly side of misbehaviors when one sees them from outside with different, critical eyes)
- * **Marshaling values into a system** (placing values in their personal hierarchy but after a group appraisal that has helped them to shape their own)
- * **Forming a values system** (integrating all the values structure into his convictions and demeanor).

Sample:

Spectrum 2. Unit # 10. Are you OK?.

The initial dialogue deals with a man who had an accident and is taken to the hospital. Upon arriving, before he is taken care of, he is asked if he has medical insurance, otherwise he cannot be assisted. The setting is a U.S. hospital. Using this situation, the steps aforementioned are implemented in six tasks that can help sensitize the students and shape in them ways of thinking and acting according with the society they live in:

1. The students are asked to detect which is the values problem in the dialogue. (experience has shown that the students are able to locate that the problem is in asking the patient about his insurance and not worrying about his life)
2. The students are asked to say which negative aspects of that society are transparent in the situation
3. The students are asked to comment on the situation with their own words (what they think about it, how they value those people's attitudes towards the wounded man, why they act like that)
4. The students are asked to contrast the situation in the U.S. to what happens in a Cuban hospital; and recall by describing it the attitude of the people in our society, the mass organizations, the government when an accident occurs
5. The students are asked to modify the contents of the dialogue in a transposition, recreating our own reality at the hospital
6. Finally, the students are asked as a follow-up to write a letter to the doctors and representatives of the U.S. hospital telling them about the

deeds and sacrifices of the Cuban doctors in Latinamerica and the efforts of the Cuban healthcare system.

The tasks move in the recognition, reproduction levels, with a successive approximation to partial production. The essence of this part of the lesson bears fruit: there is a discovering and sensitizing factor at play in the analysis of the situation, which has an effect on the students and prepares them for higher demands in further years.

5. Organizational Hints

It stands to reason that if we talk about communication, the approach cannot be that of an individualistic character. The primal foundation is that it must be a group work. But, group work does not mean that all students will embark on the task collectively. They will form small groups, what will guarantee basically two things:

- The idea of working together so that links of cooperation, mutual help, solidarity, interchange and integration are fostered in the realization of the task, and as each individual contributes his part, the team work will be enhanced. Such team work builds a relation among the members.
- The idea of allowing the development of the individuality through the creation of small groups where each member has the chance to be closely involved in the resolution of the task. This premise is vital to achieve the desired goals in the process.

Thus, class organization must be in small groups to implement the two points made, assuring that both group interrelation and individuality have their place and are both exploited towards the resolution of the problems posed in the situations through the tasks assigned to the students. The proposed figure is three or four students in each group.

CONCLUSIONS

The present educational tendencies advocate the need to form students in a most integral and humanistic concept. Today's trends in the pedagogical sciences purport the ample connotation of the contents to be learned by the students. These include the acquisition of knowledge, the development of abilities and the formation of values and sentiments adequate for an all-around personality.

Therefore, the whole instructional --and educational-- system must contribute to this end activating both the cognitive and affective domains so that the individual receives a more complete and solid preparation to face life.

Teaching tasks, as an instrument of learning, can be incorporated to the repertoire of values-forming strategies, procedures, methods that are used today and continue to be a fundamental cell of the teaching-learning process. Teaching tasks have in themselves the potential to have an incidence on the

ways of thinking and behaving of our students, if they are properly devised, presented, oriented and developed.

This article tried to prove their efficacy exploiting the materials teachers of the specialty have at hand today, and emphasizing on the fact that it is possible to turn a series that was conceived in an altogether different ideological framework into a source of positive criticism and intellectual and moral enhancement without altering the essences of the objectives of the syllabus.

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