

# **SPEAKING AS A COMMUNICATIVE ABILITY TO FOSTER VALUES IN THE ENGLISH LESSON**

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## **RESUMEN**

El presente artículo hace una valoración de las potencialidades de la habilidad expresión oral en función de la formación de valores en estudiantes de la especialidad de inglés. Se realiza un análisis de las funciones comunicativas con mayor incidencia para este trabajo, las funciones de la comunicación, la clase como eje central del trabajo con los valores, y un acercamiento al principio pedagógico fundamental de la relación entre comunicación y actividad. Los análisis realizados se consideran válidos para el trabajo con la habilidad comunicativa en otras especialidades.

## **ABSTRACT**

The article introduces an analysis of the potentialities of speaking as a communicative ability to foster a values education in the students of the specialty of English. Different aspects are treated, the communicative functions that best serve this type of education, the functions of communication, the lesson as a culture broth for the formation of values, and an approximation to a ruling pedagogical principle, the communication/activity relation. The analyses made are valid as well for the same work with the ability in other specialties.

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Speaking is a communicative ability that allows the exchange of information among individuals. Properly directed and employed, speaking can provoke reflections, debates, and activities in the classroom, which can lead to deeper scrutiny of the human being within the pedagogical process.

Pedagogical communication implies a group of parameters that must be present in the teaching-learning process, so that speaking develops into a fully communicative mechanism to effect the functions of communication. These parameters include the stimulation of the development of the student's personality, the consideration of both the teacher and the students in a bi-directional process, the recognition of the internal contradictions of the personality and of the personal relations established, as well as their solution, the recognition of changes in behavior as a process, the planned character of the pedagogical process, the recognition of the personality as an integral self and as a result of the cognitive, the affective and the behavioral facets.

The functions of communication -- informative, affective and regulatory -- are probative of the possibilities of speaking, that is, oral expression, to influence upon the individuals and trigger reflections that can have an incidence on their conducts.

Therefore, it can be stated that communication is a catalyst of the development of the personality, what makes it primordial in the system of relations established by the individuals.

This article aims at proving the possibilities of the ability to foster values within the English lesson.

## **The Functions of Communication**

The regulatory function of communication helps internalize and mold attitudes and conducts in the individual. Speaking, then, as a communicative ability, is a key part of the human relations within any activity carried out, and serves as a means of exerting an influence upon the individuals, in this case upon the participants in the teaching-learning process: the teacher and the students. That is to say, this is a bilateral process where there must be exchange of information, dialogue, development of thinking, etc.

Bobneva (1980) states that the carrying out of any collective and cooperative activity includes a personal communication because it shows the qualities of the personality. Moreover, the subject-subject relationship is regarded as a reflection of the communicative activity (Almaguer, 1997) where individuals (the students) interact: "existe una relación interpersonal, un intercambio entre personalidades con visiones diferentes del mundo y de situaciones concretas, elemento sin el cual es imposible desarrollar las individualidades si consideramos que 'la esencia humana (...) es en realidad el conjunto de las relaciones sociales' (Marx en Tesis sobre Feuerbach), es decir, en el contexto pedagógico, la clase, el intercambio social con los demás miembros del grupo genera desarrollo y cambio". (Olivé, 1999)

Consequently, the communicative process, speaking particularly, can channel a values-oriented lesson if there is a conscious preparation of the contents towards this objective and communication is used toward this end: "el proceso pedagógico ha de ser desarrollador per se, e influir irrevocablemente en la personalidad de los educandos, que han de ir modelándola a medida que este proceso avanza. Un cambio de conducta, y por tanto, una regulación de la conducta son muestra de un estadio superior de la personalidad una vez que esta se estabiliza y encauza de forma positiva". (Olivé, 1999)

### ***The Communicative Functions to Foster Values.***

Specialists on the matter have averred that while working with the language emphasis should be put on what is done with the language. This includes such matters as how people express their opinions or feelings. (Terroux and Woods, 1991).

Room must be made for the instrumentation of communicative functions such as judgment and evaluation where the students arrive at some clear evaluation of the problems that are put under their consideration.

Other specialists approach this saying that the students should comment on information showing concern and giving explanations, ask groups of learners to solve a problem (here each group arrives at a decision which is then submitted to the entire class), say what to do in a certain situation, give advice, persuade. (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1989).

The teacher's responsibilities are also an important factor for fostering values in a lesson: the preparation of **realistic** activities which have some relevance to the students' every day life and common needs, the encouragement to discuss values.

These points serve aptly for the concretion of a values-oriented lesson, as they are requisites to be followed to create a positive atmosphere and proper conditions to fulfill the goal in mind. This is summarized in the conceptions presented by Córdova Llorca (S.A., p.12) when stating that the lesson must create the "material and spiritual conditions to make the students grow...".

Within the English lesson a series of communicative functions are prioritized 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:

- A. Judgment (valuation: estimate, value, appreciate, overestimate, prejudice)
- C. Approval (expression of approval of another's behavior, performance, etc.: approve, commend, deserve, merit, give credit)
- D. Disapproval (expression of disapproval of another's behavior, performance, etc.: accuse, condemn, deplore, etc.)

He also includes "Suasion", where the following subcategory is:

- A. Suasion (persuade, suggest, advise, recommend, beg, urge)

Another author, Van Ek (1980), proposes (among others) the following categories:

- 3. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes: expressing satisfaction/dissatisfaction, expressing sympathy.
- 4. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes: expressing and inquiring about approval or disapproval, expressing appreciation.
- 5. 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:

1. Personal (where moral, intellectual and social concerns are listed).
- 3- Directive (making suggestions, requests; persuading someone to change his point of view).
5. Imaginative (solving problems).

This summed up list demonstrates that working with values (moral, professional, human) is present in the structure of the syllabi that are proposed to teach the language, and are functions the students must learn and practice in class. However, the teacher presents them, drills them; but they are not actually fully concretized so that language practice takes on a more conscious perspective aiming at using the language on a social or values-oriented angle.

Speaking as an ability to be developed in class has, therefore, potential to be used as a channel to foster values in the students. The exchange that can be brought up in a speaking lesson through debates, discussions, the resolution of problems where the students have to employ the language productively interacting and learning, creates the basis to this end.

Each of the communicative functions that can be activated in the lesson must contribute to this end. What is necessary is the creation of a proper context that facilitates this work from the perspective of the possibilities that the work with values allows.

## **The Lesson of English as a Culture Broth to Foster Values**

The awareness of the need to foster values in the lesson is in line with the contentions proposed by Government officials. It has been stated that where can really be set the bases for the education of the elements of ethical attitudes and conducts is in the classrooms (Balaguer, 1997). It is also a response to the regulations issued by the Ministry of Education in its "Programas Directores de 'Etica'" (1989) marking the contents of the different disciplines and subjects of the curriculum in the Teacher Training Colleges as basic directions that guarantee the ethical formation of the students.

The lesson of Integrated English Practice is viable for a values education. With the boost of communicative concepts in the teaching of foreign languages and the updated methodological conceptions on the matter, it has potential to carry out this type of education.

An analysis of the principles of communication renders that the contextualization of the situations is a favoring factor in this education: the exercises and tasks proposed are to spin about a thematic unity which allows focusing on their resolution without running the risk of deviating towards other topics. Also, the students should interact with one another. Interaction is understood as a cooperative exchange of thought, feelings or

ideas between two or more people, and which result in a reciprocal effect on each of them. (Douglas, 1994).

Another aspect of communicative teaching is that the topics should be appealing, meaningful, that is, relating the students to their own lives, to situations taken from emotionally close events to them that purport some relevant meaning according to the students' needs, hopes. Their experiences should be exploited for debate and reflection and a conscious and volitive assimilation of the contents to be received. Simulation activities with situations taken from reality should be proposed too. It must be pinpointed that as meaningful is understood what activates the student's interest, what relates to his life and by extension to his experiences. Also, the experiential element plays a fundamental role, what is connoted and significant, what is basic; because values are assimilated by the individual who graduates in ranks that which is, precisely, meaningful to him: the humanistic precepts of the education of man sees him as a being with particular experiences that must be considered. A learning situation should be a potentially meaningful process where the students relate new events to the already existing ones.

This aim is particularly more prone to be proficiently brought off if the lesson is taught to advanced learners, as there are more options to language use and the teacher can concentrate on a treatment to the lesson that balances ideally its educative and instructional contents, putting the students to work on productive activities which reflect social or, particularly, pedagogical problems.

The requisites of a contemporary lesson distinguish the essential aspects to be kept in mind today by a teacher:

- Political and ideological education. This is a number-one item that is to pervade the teaching-learning process. It is necessary to reformulate the oral and written texts by means of which the contents are presented, that is, vary the form to serve the effective approximation of instruction and education, so that education is implemented using texts and contexts with the professional and social goals in sight. It must be an ideologically-committed text (either oral or written) to foster values, as the political and ideological principles are values to be acquired. This education has to focus on concrete problems so that their resolution implies a direct and personal commitment.

- \_ Scientific support.

- Education of independence of behavior in the cognitive activity and the will for self-upgrading.

- Application of the knowledge, habits and abilities acquired.

- Development of creative capacities.

- \_ Education of the positive qualities of the personality.

- Formation of a culture of laboriousness.

- Consideration of individual differences.

- Positive development of each student.
- Encouragement of collectivism.

Ortiz and Meriño (1995) synthesize the ingredients of a lesson today in the following:

- \* Defined political and ideological approach, and scientifically updated. The recurrence of the political and ideological education supports the thesis of the relevance it has in the process today.
- \* Joint communication and activity in the formula teacher-student and student-student to foster motivation.
- \* Participative learning towards the acquisition of knowledge and the development of habits and skills as well as the qualities of the personality.
- \* Stimulation of intelligence and creativeness.
- \* Individualization and personalization of the process.
- \* Provoking conscious and independent behavior of the student in the cognitive activity.
- \* Link with professional life and personal experience.

In the particular case of the English lesson for advanced learners (4th-year students of the specialty of English at the Teacher Training College) it can be stated that it is an advantageous moment to propose a way to develop values in the students.

First, the language command of the students in the level is high enough to embark on more educative perspectives, so that the students can be put to carry out tasks more on the productive level. This means that it is time to use the language productively, the students have already acquired an acceptable -- in some cases high -- command of the language and the lesson should center on the pursuit of social issues that they can discuss, reflect upon, find solutions for.

Second, the units of the course can be organized thematically covering topics that encompass intentionally angles of a social connotation. Being the 4th year a conclusive one for the discipline, all the discrete elements of the language have been trained and fixed, what allows to move on to the development of critical thinking -- exploiting the students' mastery of the language -- as a vital support to face and value reality and take a posture before events and phenomena as presented in the lesson.

Third, such thematic organization presupposes the inclusion of problems and situations which would lead the students to use the language they already have a command of in tackling them. Thus, instruction is channeled -- they do learn to use the language by practicing and improving it -- through the achievement of educational goals that lead them to solve predicaments as future professionals in a gamut of social contexts: education and instruction reach a balanced and cohesive status (prerogative included in the pedagogical principles).

Fourth, the propositions that can be made should demand from the students all their knowledge, relate them to their experience, and set the basis for their understanding of phenomena and the objects of analysis. If the student comprehends the object, sees it as the bearer of a problem and confronts it, he is stepping towards the solution of this problem, whatever its nature. To this end, he productively faces it as a new situation that requires changes and acts upon it.

Fifth, the situations are mostly elaborated on the bases of the realities faced by the students in their internship, this means that confronting other students from other years with them, would also violate the principle that activities in class must be linked to the students' experiences.

## **A Ruling Pedagogical Principle**

The Link of Activity and Communication. An adequate communication lubricates the activity undertaken and creates a favorable atmosphere of mutual comprehension among the individuals. As well, an activity thus developed facilitates understanding, exchange and communication. "La comunicación se da en el seno de una actividad determinada socialmente y que hace eco en la personalidad del educando: La teoría marxista-leninista del desarrollo de la personalidad plantea que el joven deviene personalidad bajo la influencia del sistema de relaciones sociales en que se desarrolla, y en particular a través de las actividades colectivas que realiza". (Olivé, 1999)

Here is established an interpersonal relationship, an interchange among people with different approaches to life. This is vital for the development of the individual within the activity he is carrying out and the type of communication he establishes with the group. Some suggestions given here are the stirring of interpersonal communication, the integral activation of all the functions of communication, the propitiation of debate, the implementation of group interaction, the proper orientation of the tasks, the alternation of the roles and responsibilities for the different activities (Ortiz and Meriño, 1995).

It can be concluded, then, that communication, and speaking within it, are favorable to influence upon the individual and form his values systems. Communication, and speaking particularly, help solve conflicts, harmonizes contradictions and facilitates the development of the individuals engaged in it. Communication is a must in instruction and education as dialoguing, exchanging, debating are favored, what activates the cognition-affectiveness dynamics, and lubricates the communication-activity formula in the pedagogical process.

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### *Appendix.*

Taken from "La comunicación y el desarrollo de la personalidad de los sujetos". Author: Miguel Olivé Iglesias, 1999.

"En una clase de inglés, circumscribiéndonos al microcontexto de la especialidad del autor de este artículo, un tema sobre el machismo, por ejemplo, seria desencadenador de todo un cúmulo de opiniones, puntos de vista, críticas que pueden estancarse sin solución aparente si no se establecen las normas concretas de la comunicación, si no hay flexibilidad, capacidad de escuchar a los demás, de aportar y prestar atención, de guiar hacia un fin; y por tanto no habrá desarrollo.

Mas si se encauza adecuadamente, el tema puede llevar a los sujetos a pensar, a involucrarse, a sopesar opiniones diversas a la luz de nuevos enfoques, sobre todo si hay respeto y se oye lo que los demás tienen que decir sobre el problema. Martí decía que "la libertad vive de respeto, y la razón se nutre en la controversia" y han de educarse los jóvenes en la "... práctica de decir sin miedo lo que piensan; y oír sin ira y sin mala sospecha lo que piensan otros". (Ideario Pedagógico). Esta atmósfera propicia un ambiente favorable y permite que incluso alumnos tímidos hablen, haciendo uso de los conocimientos y las habilidades adquiridas en el idioma extranjero para hacer juicios valorativos que llevan a la reflexión de todos.

El nexos positivo, entonces, de la comunicación y la actividad -caldo de cultivo favorecedor del mejoramiento conductual del individuo- en el ámbito pedagógico, la clase en particular, y donde la actuación de este individuo queda expresada en la relación comunicación-actividad, permitirá medir su evolución adecuada, su nivel de inserción en la vida social y su capacitación para a su vez influir a través de la comunicación sobre otros individuos (sus alumnos y la comunidad) con el efecto educativo virtualmente multiplicador que le corresponde en su actividad profesional específica".