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# Effective Communication in the Education Sector

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María del Mar Paulo Noguera<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Communication is the most fundamental process of personal development. It is through the communicative act that we socialise and learn, so intelligent and effective communication invites interpersonal relationships, which in turn lead to the overall development of a person. All human behaviour is communicative. It is impossible not to communicate. To achieve this, we have several languages in human interaction: from body and facial language to silence, including personal appearance. There are also other languages such as music, art in general, tastes, images, signs, etc.

The emotional component in education becomes fundamental because without emotion there is no learning. Therefore, in order to achieve effective communication in the classroom, we need to deepen the so-called soft skills, or the social and communicative skills of teaching: empathy, respect, trust, affectivity, security, assertiveness, clarity, active listening, feedback, looks, smiles, gestures and tone of voice, among others.

Educational communication must open the door to the richness and variety of languages in order to establish the most enriching communicative processes possible, which allow learners to reach their full potential. For this reason, we must rely on the word, but also on images, music, the language of the body – in short, on the expression of emotions and feelings at the same time as reflection and thought.

**Keywords:** effective communication, human interaction, educational communication, soft skills, social and communicative skills of teachers

## 1. What Do We Understand by Communication?

Communication is the most fundamental process of personal development through which we socialise and learn. We spend most of our time communicating, in one way or another, by living with others, with ourselves and with the universe. We can therefore affirm that communication is the basis of all human relationships: to exchange information and knowledge, to analyse situations, to reflect and think together. But also, to share emotions, feelings, affections, hopes and dreams.

Traditionally, every act of communication has been associated with the transmission of information, ideas and emotions. However, if a message is misunderstood, there is no communication, because all communication

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<sup>1</sup> **María del Mar Paulo Noguera**, doktorica znanosti na Katoličkom sveučilištu „San Vicente Martir“ u Valenciji, Španjolska

relationships are symmetrical or complementary. Any interaction between agents implies the necessary relationship established within the communicative process.

The fact is that communication is a relational process between people that is not always easy, because we are not all the same, we do not all think the same, we do not all feel the same, we do not all have the same experiences. That is why communication is not always successful. The effectiveness of communication depends to a large extent on our ability to consider the other person, to understand what is expected of us and to reach the other person. And for this, it is essential to have a close, attentive, patient and active listening attitude in order to capture the interests and concerns of others (Ferrés & Massanet, 2017). Gutiérrez & Buitrago (2019) insist on the need to consolidate the classroom as a space of support, empathy, cooperation, good treatment and meaningful learning to enable educational practices that promote peace and coexistence.

It should be noted that communication does not only refer to the verbalisation of linguistic forms, but requires sociolinguistic skills, knowledge and attitudes that are conditioned by the norms of social interaction (degree of politeness, relationship between interlocutors, communicative situation...), pragmatic (use of tone of voice, gesticulation, turn of speech, facilitating elements...) and psychological (self-knowledge, self-regulation, self-understanding, sensitivity towards others, empathy...). The teacher transmits and communicates not only through verbal but also through non-verbal forms (Bisquerra & López, 2020).

In short, to communicate effectively, it is necessary to connect with others, both emotionally and intellectually. Knowing what they expect from us and what we want to communicate, what their interests are, what they know about the subject we are dealing with, how they feel before we speak, what will motivate them to listen actively... As Sanz (2005) points out, intelligent and effective communication invites interpersonal relationships, interaction, which in turn involves the integral development of the person and is the basis of all human activity.

## **2. Non-verbal Communication**

According to the above, communication is a complex act that must be studied from a systemic approach. The object of study is not the actors, nor the message, but the interaction, the relationship established within the communicative process. If we look at the many and varied forms of communication (speech, writing, drawing, music, dance, gestures, codes...), we find that in many cases music or painting, art in general, allows us to express emotions, feelings, moods and sensations more effectively than speech.

Personal appearance, clothing, tattoos, hairstyles, the perfume we use... are also part of language in that they convey information to those around us. Flavours mimic situations and evoke memories. Images, animate or inanimate, refer us to known relationships, give us information, make us feel and move us. In short, our relationship with the world around us and with ourselves grows and is enriched by a rich and varied range of forms of communication that allow us to approach and connect with the universe. The combination of languages, in the right proportions, appropriate to each situation, will allow an integrated and harmonious learning that will help to understand the world and people. (Comas, 2016)

## **2.1. Facial and Body Language**

We tend to think that we communicate mainly through words, but in reality, as Ramón-Cortés (2011) points out, it is the body that speaks incessantly, showing not what we say but what we feel. Physical communication plays an essential role in human interaction, as it is inextricably linked to verbal communication, either complementing it, reinforcing it or, in certain cases, replacing it (a smile, a turn of the back...). The face, the gaze, the posture convey essential information to the interlocutor, sometimes unconsciously, which is manifested at the physiological level (Comas, 2016). In addition, we learn to interpret non-verbal language and underlying emotions in early childhood, even before verbal language.

Body movements, for example, give us important information about the relationship between interlocutors or their confidence in what is being said and done. An upright and relaxed posture, a confident gait, control of movements, naturalness, a forward gaze and hand placement convey confidence on the part of the communicator. On the other hand, uncontrolled movements, tension in the body, slumped shoulders, lowered gaze, looking for support... communicate insecurity in what is being said or in oneself. They also often indicate that the person is under pressure and does not feel comfortable in the communicative exchange.

The eyes, the gaze, are the tell-tale signs of our language. A lost, darting, evasive look indicates that the person does not want to face the situation, that he/she is afraid or ashamed. A sustained look, on the other hand, indicates confidence to face the challenge. A penetrating gaze imposes; an up and down gaze makes us feel small... Using the gaze to our advantage can help us to control a situation, while using it poorly can put us at a disadvantage or give us away. In fact, we can communicate more effectively when we are aware of our thoughts, sensations or emotions. (Comas, 2016).

Facial gestures are crucial and convey information. They do not go unnoticed and usually have a clear meaning (Ramón-Cortés, 2011). Our facial expressions reflect our emotions. Thus, although many of the gestures and body postures are cultural, especially in relation to the proximity between speakers and physical or visual contact, there are universal aspects that can be detected in speakers around the world in relation to the basic emotions identified by Oster & Ekman (1981).

## **2.2. Voice and Silence**

The timbre, the tone, the speed, the rhythm create an effect of reassurance or overpowering, even overshadowing the content of the words. Politicians and public figures know that communication is everything, so they have advisors, image specialists who guide and advise them on movements, the most appropriate positions, clothing, tone of voice, gestures... (Castells, 2015).

On the other hand, silence has great communicative power. Let us not forget that forcing verbal communication can, at certain times, create more distance than rapprochement. In fact, in tense situations, when words fail to convey true feelings or intentions, silence is a powerful tool for restoring tranquillity. A gesture, a look of understanding, patient listening or simply silence is often much more effective in the face of an emotional explosion. Silence helps us get in touch with ourselves, sharpens the language of the senses and brings us back to emotional calm. As Ramón-Cortés (2011) reminds us, silence also speaks, and with great force.

## **3. Communication in the Classroom**

Based on a comparative study of different socialising collectives (teachers, priests, publicists and journalists), Ferrés & Massanet (2017) analysed the conception they have of communicative processes and of the necessary requirements to achieve communicative effectiveness, contrasting their answers with the latest advances in neuroscience.

According to the authors, a high percentage of teachers tend to confuse communicative ability with knowledge of a subject, leading them to prioritize transmitting information and focusing on cognitive aspects. In this sense, according to the data obtained, the majority of the group believes that if good academic results are not obtained, it is due to the lack of interest of the addressee, thus avoiding any responsibility in the communicative act.

For Guerrero & Cambres (2018), the balance between the cognitive and the affective in the educational process has not been balanced, rather the cognitive has traditionally taken precedence. However, advances in neuroscience argue for the role of emotions in learning. If the sender takes the receiver into account, captures his or her needs and concerns, learns to seduce and excite them, communication becomes much more effective. As Ibarrola (2013) points out, without the emotional component, there is no learning. Laughter, humour, affection, excitement, joy, illusion, beauty... are part of life and therefore, according to the author, a necessary condition for learning and growth. In short, you only learn what you love (Mora, 2013).

In this sense, educators need to learn how to interact with others and how their brains work. Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera (2007) remind us that there is a solid fusion between emotions and thoughts, which allows us to think more intelligently and make decisions more effectively. Therefore, Ferrés & Massanet (2017) highlight the following aspects: if there is no emotional response, there is no interest, no real learning, learning that focuses only on the cognitive is doomed to failure; the human mind is designed to solve problems through its interaction with others and the environment, brain passivity produces boredom and demotivation; we only learn what interests us, what seduces us, what we are passionate about; the story activates empathy and allows us to connect with the experience, whether true or not, which activates the perceptual, motor and emotional systems that drive cognition.

Bisquerra & López (2020) also stress that student participation in the learning process increases motivation and improves performance. Active listening is not enough. Murayama et al (2016) bet on the use of positive feedback to stimulate the brain's reward circuits and motivate learning. Stimulating students and arousing their curiosity helps to maintain attention and concentration during class sessions (Benavidez and Flores, 2019). It is therefore essential to have effective pedagogical communication, which in turn implements an emotional education that invites an appropriate response to each situation.

In short, the mind is a network and therefore effective communication in the classroom must involve the creation of interaction networks between actors: collaborative work, dialogic learning, interaction between codes, use of different tools... The main thing, if we want effective communication in the classroom, is to know the mind of our interlocutor in order to activate positive emotions towards learning, thus avoiding indifference and discontent (Ferrés & Massanet, 2017).

## 4. Social and Communicative Skills of the Teacher

In order to make the teaching-learning process as adequate and satisfactory as possible, Pulido (2009) focuses on specifying the skills that the teacher must acquire in order to promote communication and correct interaction between group members. According to the behavioural, cognitive and environmental components proposed by Caballo (1993), Pulido (2009) refers to empathy, assertiveness, active listening, as well as the verbal and non-verbal components that favour communication and interaction (clarity, feedback, tone of voice, gaze, smile, gestures, affectivity or security).

In relation to socio-emotional skills, Herrera, Buitrago & Parandones (2015) insist on the need to develop this type of skills in teachers in order to be able to deal with everyday situations. For Gutiérrez & Buitrago (2019), if we want to create a peaceful coexistence in the classroom, the mediation of the teacher as a transforming agent through interaction and guidance is essential. Moreover, Guerrero & Cambres (2018) point out that students cannot be accompanied in their emotional management if teachers lack emotional competence. In this sense, Whitehead & Suave (2018) argue that both the classroom climate and the relationship between the group class and motivation to learn are highly conditioned by emotional learning, which is linked to the rest of learning. Therefore, an adequate management of socio-emotional and communicative skills leads to a more effective interaction in the classroom and generates communicative exchanges that generate learning (Extremera, Rey & Pena, 2016; Mariño, Pulido & Morales, 2016).

### 4.1. Empathy

Empathy is a conscious attitude that involves an effort to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, to tune into his or her feelings, needs and expectations.... In the communicative relationship, this conscious effort involves connecting with our interlocutor, activating patience, understanding, affection and respect for the other, despite differences, in order to establish an effective communicative flow that allows the message to be conveyed without elements that distort it.

Every communicative situation requires an empathic capacity if we want to reach the other person effectively. In order to do this, it is important to review our own process, to keep in mind our own trajectory and our own experiences in moments similar to those experienced by our interlocutor. This introspection enables us to put ourselves in their shoes, to relive moments in our lives when we encountered them or felt like them, and to understand what they need. The communicative exchange only comes about when both parties are involved in

the process of constructing meaning. This means that without interest in others, there is no connection and therefore no communication.

In education, empathic communication with our students is essential. For Extremera, Rey and Pena (2016), the use of empathic responses by the teacher to the behaviour of the student allows the improvement of behaviour and the improvement of communicative relationships in the classroom. As adults who have gone through a learning process, as the old professor Morrie Shwartz points out to his former student Mitch Albom (1997), we must be able to understand what students feel and how they experience their learning. According to Ibarrola (2013), feelings, emotions and learning are closely related.

Therefore, the use of storytelling in education is a fabulous tool that allows us to connect and facilitate interpretation. Its effectiveness is based on the paradigm of mirror neurons, which have a strong associative capacity, as they connect the different motor, emotional and cognitive systems with the perceptual system (Ferrés & Massanet, 2017). The story helps us to keep our minds alert, to activate empathy and to connect with the experience, whether real or fictional.

#### **4.2. Active Listening, Respect and Trust**

For interaction to be possible, we must learn to listen. We do not communicate for ourselves but to reach others, so we need to make sure that we are understood. Paraphrasing or summarising the message heard, without interrupting the communication, is a good way of demonstrating this, in addition to the expressions or body signals mentioned above.

Sometimes we make serious communication mistakes that end up undermining our ability to communicate. Some of the most common problems in interpersonal communication are: pre-empting the sender without allowing them to express themselves fully; labelling the sender or the message; making accusations in the past that are not relevant; looking for guilt; or avoiding clear feedback by not addressing the issues.

Ramón-Cortés (2011) reminds us that fear of listening, clinging to an idea or a point of view for fear of losing control blocks the flow of communication, rapprochement and exchange, which is one of the greatest enemies of communication. The aim of all communication is not to impose criteria or points of view, but to find common solutions to a situation or a problem.

There is no communication without active listening. For Hernando, Aguado & Pérez (2011), listening implies understanding and care, which are essential in any communicative process, but especially in educational communication. It seems simple and fundamental, but it is certainly a difficult attitude to find. We are in a hurry. We are doing many things at the same time and it is difficult for

us to be fully available to the messages of those who speak to us, to empathise with them and to understand them in every sense of the word. Listening involves affection and learning to live in peace. It involves: believing that another person has something interesting to tell me; giving another person quality time, from the heart; looking with gratitude and acceptance; asking with sincere interest; offering help and trust; valuing the ideas, feelings and tastes of others; being grateful for the opportunity to be enriched by the other person.

All in all, an empathetic, open, non-judgmental attitude, as well as verbal and non-verbal signals that show that we are following and understanding the message, are the elements that prepare us for listening and facilitate communication. We can summarise them in four basic points: preparing to listen; controlling our gaze, posture and gestures; catching the main ideas; and giving feedback. On the other hand, distraction, haste, value judgments, interruptions, rejection or minimisation of the message show a significant lack of connection that severely disrupts the communication process. As Torralba (2007) points out, listening means paying attention to the other person, to his or her words, gestures, face and hands; it is an act of devotion to the other, of generosity, which necessarily implies duality.

It is important to note that communication does not take place in a climate of mistrust and lack of respect. It is essential to have confidence in both our criteria and message in order to facilitate effective listening and understanding. Moreover, we cannot create a climate of trust without respect for others and their opinions, without connection or empathy, without affection and closeness, without sincerity and naturalness. We must not forget that trust is earned, not imposed, and to earn it, we should offer others a feeling of security and affection, despite disagreements.

### **4.3. Dialogue in the Classroom**

Reyes (1997) sees educational communication as a dialogical process. The educator and the learner participate in learning and teaching through interaction that takes place in the classroom in order to construct the learning content together. The learner's mind needs activity to remain attentive, so constant questioning and encouragement of intervention and participation are essential for promoting mutual understanding.

According to Ferrés & Masanet (2017), the human mind is designed to solve problems through interaction with others and the environment. Therefore, without dialogue, without communicative exchange, there is no learning. The mere transmission of knowledge from one to many, without interruption,

without dialogue, without mutual approach, leads to cerebral passivity and consequently to boredom and demotivation.

Therefore, communicative exchange in a dialogue and participatory climate is the key to effective educational communication, fostering positive emotions that increase the desire to learn. In this sense, Alzate & Castañeda (2020) insist that it is necessary to promote educational practices based on creative, motivating and respectful dialogue in order to challenge intelligence and promote meaningful learning. Of course, we cannot expect our students to process information the way we do. We understand and interpret according to our own experiences and personal journeys, so we always make a subjective interpretation of what we are told.

It is necessary to check the understanding of the message, considering that a communicative process is not effective if the message does not arrive faithfully (Badajoz and Rodríguez, 2018). In this sense, it is useful to pause, observe the non-verbal communication of our interlocutors, ask for feedback, allow interventions, dialogue with students, check if clarifications are needed and repeat using other words, if necessary. If the aim is communicative effectiveness, we cannot just talk and talk and expect them to follow us anyway.

#### **4.4. Assertiveness and Emotional Control**

In educational communication, assertiveness is necessary to make our message credible. Triana & Velásquez (2014), state that assertive communication is directly related to a positive classroom climate, while non-assertive teacher communication negatively affects the classroom climate. On the other hand, Valente, Monteiro & Lourenço (2019) point out that those teachers who manage to have greater emotional control and regulation are able to exercise greater discipline management in the classroom, since emotional control allows regulating verbal and nonverbal behaviour in uncomfortable situations.

Being open to dialogue does not mean that we are malleable and manipulable. Sometimes we need to communicate something that we know our interlocutor will not like, so knowing how to deliver the message at the right time and with the right sensitivity will allow us to ease the possible tension caused by the words. Similarly, the appropriate use of refusal, with the least possible emotional cost, should be part of our resources for effective communication in the classroom. Learning to say “no” is a difficult aspect to assume and even more difficult to transmit with affectivity, but this right, whether it is communicated with the voice, the look, gestures or silence, reaffirms us in our position and affirms us in front of others (Álava, 2015).

## 5. Conclusions

We learn to learn, to be, to live through interaction with others and with the environment, so communication is the most fundamental process of personal development. The contexts that encourage a healthy interaction, an intelligent and effective communication through several languages that we know, stimulate learning and the integral growth of every human being. The classroom thus becomes a space where learning based on dialogue, interaction, storytelling, active listening, empathy, connection with others and growth based on human values of respect, coexistence and affection can be promoted.

For this reason, educational communication must be conducive to understanding as well as to promoting the comprehensive growth of the learner through the varied and rich range of languages that facilitate effective communicative processes. An effective communicative process in the classroom involves learning not only curricular content, but also feelings and emotions. Reflection and thinking grow in a dialogical environment, multiplied by the freedom to express, by the lack of fear of exposure, by the attitude of closeness and understanding.

In conclusion, educational communication is much more effective with socio-emotionally and communicatively competent teachers, who are able to integrate into their classroom those tools that facilitate approach and interaction. The mind needs challenges and questions; the heart needs affection, understanding and security. An educational environment that encourages dialogue, active listening, respect and empathy is an environment open to learning and growth.

## 6. Literature

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