

(RE)CLAIMING SPACE IN FUTURE EDUCATION. ARGUMENTS FOR A HUMAN-CENTRED APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY USE

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Abstract: The meteoric growth of Artificial Intelligence in all areas of activity of our postmodern society definitely reshapes the higher education landscape as well. Task achievement both by students and teachers has been substantially facilitated by emerging technologies. Equally important, the availability of learning platforms allowing teaching/learning customization and real-time feedback stands out as a significant factor that enables the fluency of pedagogical communication by increasing the equilibrium of the teacher-student interaction.

Alternatively, it is our strong belief that we need to counterbalance technological resources with human intervention in order to shape a balance between students' knowledge expectations and teachers' subject matter expertise. The article aims to highlight the role and place held by AI in the teaching process by analysing ways and practices of knowledge transmission to PR and Communication students. The introduction of the emotional component in association with technological resources in the teaching activity, presumed to streamline and enhance the quality of the education process, disproves the diminution of the teacher's traditional role caused by the presence of AI in education.

Keywords: teacher-student interaction, technological resources, teacher's role, balanced relationship, future education

Introduction

The classic image of the academic environment, marked by the teacher - student social distance, involving specific verbal and non-verbal behaviours, is gradually shrinking nowadays. Internet and new communication technologies, coupled with the medical and social crisis caused by Covid-19, have led to the unprecedented digitalization of education, particularly of higher education. Furthermore, the recent interest in AI invasion of all educational areas, generating both controversies and efforts for finding solutions regarding responsible and ethical use of AI, the reconfiguration of the educational system has become a priority for all educational organizations.

Approaching higher education as a space that provides students with the opportunity to express themselves and explore their potential, the integration of technology in the educational context involves the expression of participants in both real and virtual environments. It is a well-known fact that each environment is characterized by specific properties, rules, norms and constraints, the real environment being governed by a high degree of formality, whereas the digital environment is permissive and informal. These two realities function complementarily and reshape current academic communication. The complementarity of the concrete and virtual environments in the field of education triggers a blurring of the formal character and conversely foregrounds the informal character of verbal and nonverbal behaviours of participants (L. Suci, 2014; L. Suci, 2021).

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Emerging as the result of diverse influences (Suci, Badea, 2018), the new configuration of academic communication is facilitated by recalibrating the teacher-student

relationship achievable through minimizing the large social distance between them, which is fed by cognitive and cultural barriers. The teacher's legitimacy as the exclusive holder of information positions him/her as an authority entitled to demand obedience, a context that generates the large social distance characteristic of teaching and learning interactions, which undermines adequate information transfer (Meirieu, 2010). The infusion of affectivity in pedagogical discourse compensates for the impact of communication barriers, acknowledging the repositioning of the teacher and the circularity of emotions, which ensures the communication flow necessary for knowledge transfer and rebalances the teacher-student relationship (Suciu, 2014).

With the integration of technology, task fulfilment has been facilitated both for students and teachers. The use of ICT and learning platforms augmented by the use of open and digital resources serve teaching and learning, evaluation and transmission of real-time feedback, enabling the fluency of pedagogical communication and contributing to a well-balanced relationship between protagonists. The permissiveness of the environment and the capability of AI generate the diversity of pedagogical approaches and learning activities facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

Despite the numerous, yet unignorable advantages, there are several technology-related limitations signalled out by professionals. Margarida Romero, Jonathan Reyes and Panos Kostakos (2024) pinpoint several, of which some are associated with AI applications:

the lack of human interaction, limited understanding of the technology, potential biases in training data sets, lack of creativity, dependency on the data available or generated for AI training, lack of contextual understanding, limited ability to personalise instruction, and privacy concerns (p. 131).

Furthermore, Rudolph et al. highlight the consequences regarding the evaluation of students' work originality from the perspective of the gap arising from the use of traditional assessment methods in relation to the availability of tools like ChatGPT (as cited in Romero, Reyes, Kostakos, 2023, p.130). Consequently, on a global level, empowered organizations such as UNESCO and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) plead for a human-centred approach to technology use as the future direction in education (Hamilton, 2024).

Given this context, the authors' focus is on the human-technology coexistence in education, more specifically on ways of weighting the abstract, specialized character in knowledge transmission. Addressing students' expectations and needs, not only their need to understand, but also their need to be understood, to assimilate knowledge, to express themselves freely, creatively, claims enforcement of a well-balanced ratio between the student's cognitive needs and what can offer the teacher's professional skills and technology-related skills. In order to achieve empathetic communication and an implicit relational calibration, the authors advocate the insertion of an emotional component to compensate the technical, specialised content, able to make the student resonate with the transmitted content, its comprehension and assimilation. Envisaged as capable to ensure the efficacy and quality of the educational process, the proposed strategy is subsequently explained by relating it to the real-life situation of transferring specialized knowledge to students majoring in Communication Studies and Public Relations.

The research methodology is based on theories related to communication and influence, of which some are of reference in the field, such as the theory of change and social power (French & Raven, 1959), as well as on recent theories that include the theory of communication processes (Mucchielli, 2002) and the discursive models of influence (Duarte, 2010). In order to explain how meaning arises in the communication situation subject to analysis, the authors resort to discourse analysis and linguistic pragmatics as tools that successfully complete the applied methodological framework. Moreover, the authors appreciate that by appealing to a discursive strategy specific to storytelling, the affective component can be introduced at the

macro-discursive level, which compensates for the technical, theoretical character, leading to the enforcement of relational balance, capable of allowing the success of information transfer. The interpretation of the communication situation in these terms reveals the place and role held by each of the components of the human-technical cleavage in the teaching process.

Analysing the situation of the didactic communication

The didactic discourse is undoubtedly a discourse of credibility since the role of adviser and pathfinder entails guiding students on a path unknown to them. By challenging their curiosity, by making them discover the secrets of the universe of knowledge, by inspiring them, the teacher is the model to follow. But the teacher's superior position, owing to his/her cognitive and cultural legitimacy, tends to threaten the relational balance in the didactic interaction.

In the case of first-year students majoring in Communication and Public Relations, the relevance of a specialized course lies in providing and developing a fundamental set of competencies and skills. On the other hand, a number of factors contribute to the underlying manifestation of a degree of difficulty that threatens the transmission and reception/retention of information, which include:

- the specificity of the course scope (introductory course in the field)
- specialized language/terminology specific to the field
- the abstract/theoretical character of the course topics
- the density of new information
- the multitude of concepts
- text density
- the existence of hasty presumptions or conclusions regarding the content (issued either by the teacher, who may consider the information known to the student, or by the students, who may have the impression that what is transmitted to them is known/simple) etc.

Some of these factors, such as the ones mentioned above, are related to the nature of the discipline; however, conjunctural factors can be identified as well, for instance: the course is aimed at first-year students, going through the process of adapting both to the field of knowledge and to the specificity of the higher education system; the student's mental state at the time (fatigue, lack of attention, concern for a problem, etc.); the teacher's superior position (from a cultural and cognitive perspective).

The approach from the perspective of communication (Tran, Stănciugelu, 2000) translates these factors into barriers at the level of the message (conception and language barriers), at the level of the receiver, position barriers (of the sender and receiver) and environmental barriers (e.g. textual density, inadequate climate (p. 20-22)). Their intervention prevents the proper development of communication, reducing the efficiency of information transfer, which, for the analysis of the communication situation in the academic environment, is equivalent to a failure in the transmission and reception/understanding/assimilation of knowledge.

The search for and application of solutions that would lead to the efficiency of the teaching process generated updated results in the registered linguistic strategies (Suciu, 2014). Necessary for the development of communication in empathic terms and the achievement of the pedagogical goal, the modalities detectable at the micro-level of the discourse attest to the teacher's shift from the position of authority to that of collaborator. In turn – according to the theory of communication developed by A. Mucchielli (2002) – this repositioning entails the modification of the position of the student-interlocutor, who transgresses the lower level (from a cognitive and cultural point of view), placing himself/herself on one of cooperation.

Mediated by discourse, access to the new position occurs not only through language, through the use of linguistic strategies presumable to shrink the existing social and/or cultural

distance, but also through the manner of organizing the discourse, through a structural strategy. Actors' repositioning determines the reconfiguration of the relationship among them: if, initially, there was a relationship marked by social and cultural distance, through discourse, the relationship turns into one of cooperation, collaboration and teamwork. It is equally important to note that the teacher's repositioning does not coincide with the symbolic loss of the legitimate power as "the one entitled to speak", nor of the referential power, updated as a model (French & Raven, 1959) owing to discursive credibility. Bill Bernbach, Creative Director of the international advertising agency *Doyle Dane Bernbach* says:

„The truth isn't the truth until people believe you, and they can't believe you if they don't know what you're saying, and they can't know what you're saying if they don't listen to you, and they won't listen to you if you're not interesting, and you won't be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly.” ([://www.reallyhelpfulmarketing.co.uk/news/the-truth-isnt-the-truth-until-people-believe-you/](http://www.reallyhelpfulmarketing.co.uk/news/the-truth-isnt-the-truth-until-people-believe-you/)).

The credibility of the speech able to trigger adhesion sustains, on the one hand, the trust in the person who assumes the speech, and, on the other hand, guarantees the students' participation and involvement. Hence, the situation becomes favourable for the assimilation of new specialized and technical knowledge.

Still, what are the means available for the transmitter-teacher in order to build the credible didactic discourse within the context of the co-existence of the double, concrete/virtual reality? Considering the macro-discursive level, the key element aimed at capturing the audience's attention is represented by the discourse organization. It is no longer a novelty that the place held by the lecture has been awarded to the presentation with technical support, most frequently to the PowerPoint presentation. Being a technical tool that claims a particular content structuring, the PowerPoint presentation updates design principles regarding text, image insertion, its correlation with the text, the use of colours, contrasts, shapes and volumes (Duarte, 2008; Reynolds, 2008; Joannès, 2009).

The variety of means made available by the use of technological and digital resources simplifies the task of creating a discourse with technical support. The numerous templates (slidedocs templates), in which the text is inserted, reduce considerably the working time needed for the preparation of the teaching materials. Deploying the technical support, however, does not exclude the manifestation of ethos, which is present not only in the language used in the text and presentation, but also through the selection of the model and the organization of ideas in the discourse.

Translating the transmitter-teacher's attitude towards discourse and, simultaneously, towards interlocutor (students), the technical support is meant to support the actors' repositioning. In designing learning content on digital supports, the intervention of technological resources consists mainly, at the text level, in inserting links, images, audio-video materials that function as glosses of the transmitted message, bringing additional information relatable to the content and, thus, contributing to its development/clarification/corroboration. Additionally, glosses can induce analogies and synapses through which, depending on the student's cognitive and cultural background, the displayed information is received, understood and retained in a much easier manner.

Viewing students as a collectivity organized as a working group with specific norms and values, the knowledge of which grants the teacher the privilege of choosing those images, links, audio-video materials and certain models of exposition that capture attention and produce an effect, the authors appreciate that the act of selection operated by the teacher conveys a distinct meaning. When the teacher uses technological and digital resources to adapt the content to the audience, he/she performs an act of communication that attests to the expression of ethos and simultaneously transmits the implicit meaning related to the attention paid to the students, the sensitivity to their preferences/values, etc. The meaning found in the implicit level of the

pedagogical discourse allows the teacher to reposition students (by taking into account their preferences/values), whereas students no longer perceive the teacher as being placed in a superior position. Consequently, the distance between them is shrinking. The implicit meaning betrays the presence of the affective in the discursive layer, along with the analytical aspect of the explicit content. Given the context and purpose of the pedagogical discourse, maintaining the right proportion between the emotional and the analytical in its architecture is essential for the credibility of the discourse (Duarte, 2010). The manifestation of ethos confers, under these circumstances, credibility to the discourse; reversely, the lack of moderation in the insertion of the affective-emotional elements leads to the loss of sender's credibility.

The manner in which the pedagogical discourse is structured/delivered, in the authors' opinion, responds to the requirement for success of the didactic process by inducing audience's resonance with the content. In the teaching practice, with the help of technologies, the authors have applied a knowledge-presentation strategy based on the discursive model of storytelling, within which they used techniques for capturing and relaunching attention and language strategies. Since the feedback on students' understanding and adherence has been positive, the authors recommend detailing it in the manner described subsequently.

At the structural level, the suggested model of the didactic discourse, inspired by the storytelling scheme, capitalizes on the technique of contrast, entailing the alternation of opposite poles: on the one hand, reality and, on the other hand, aspiration/desire/hope (N. Duarte, 2010). The knowledge of the audience/students (their cognitive and cultural level, status, role performed) allows, as it has been previously shown, not only the selection of the presentation model/slidedocs template, but also of the language and content strategies. In addition to this, the information about students held by the teacher conditions the setting of didactic goals and the outline of teaching purposes. The authors have conceived the teaching of new knowledge based on the contrast technique as a phased exposition. A first, introductory stage describes the current state of affairs, making reference to already-known information. The already-established effect of facilitating understanding and assimilation, produced by the communication strategy of presenting new information by correlating it with previous information, can be intensified by the infusion of emotion. At this point, the authors are considering the use of linguistic strategies meant to trigger curiosity, to capture attention (*a frequently-advanced idea according to which / as you may know, many professionals claim.../ supporters of this idea argue...*). With a function similar to the beginning formulas of stories, the introduction of the subject has the role of raising interest in what is about to be presented, suggesting, at the same time, the abandonment of the known perspective and the entry into the scene of the new.

According to the rhetorical ethos – logos – pathos triad that supports the discursive credibility, the affective aspect is compensated by the transmission of specialized information and new knowledge. The integration into the cognitive sphere, marked by the explicit expression of the objective, coincides, from the students' perspective, with the second stage, in which the proper content is presented by updating strategies such as: explanation, example, use of alternative codes, analogy, comparison, humour, etc. Claimed by the balance between logic and emotionality, indispensable to the discourse credibility, the integration of affectivity in the analytical path is revealed in:

- opposition of the current situation in the cognitive layer and the verbalization of the goal to be achieved (reachable progress through the assimilation of new knowledge)
- choosing examples from students' lives with the purpose of getting them involved and facilitating understanding
- choosing examples from the teacher's personal life with the purpose of reducing social distance

- explaining figures/data by revealing the underlying factors and their visual representation as the graphs
- explicit expression of the practical relevance of theory
- contextualization understood as putting the abstract phenomenon in a real/known/already-established context

Not at all insignificant, the importance of the linguistic and content strategies staged within the discursive model relies on their function of supporting the balanced edification and impact of the presentation. Equally, they are responsible for the formation and development of secondary skills, such as critical thinking, adaptability, the ability to make analogies and synapses. From the perspective of content accessibility, there are two strategies that the authors intend to focus on, namely, contextualization and explanation of figures/data through the use of alternative codes.

A complex process, both through the underlying inferential process and through the results likely to be produced, contextualization captures a transgression in two directions: from the unknown to the known and vice versa. First, the theoretical problem is projected against a familiar universe by constructing a context; in this way, the student is given the chance to reason in already-known terms in order to understand. From this point, he/she must return to the theoretical layer in order to strengthen his/her cognitive acquisition. The oscillation from the theoretical/logical to the practical/habitual and back again captures, in fact, a slide between the analytical and the emotional, since the placement in the usual context implies subjectivity and therefore, the affective. The creation of a context in the familiar universe transposes the problematization from the theoretical, abstract layer to the layer of known/lived experiences, facilitating the access to meaning. The strategy triggers reasoning by analogy that stimulates the identification of meaning, developing critical thinking and stimulating the ability to understand and memorize.

Holding a distinct place in achieving credibility, figure/data explanation by means of alternative codes can involve the emotional aspect through information regarding the causes, consequences or factors that generated the data and the related gaps. The explanations offered in this respect, if not regularly, at least in some cases, are related to the subjective dimension. Face-to-face interaction favours the possibility of achieving empathic communication through ways of emphasizing differences (paralanguage, mimicry), of extrapolating/amplifying consequences, etc. (pauses in speech, gesture, mimicry). On the other hand, the underlying contribution of technology to the production of the effect is related to the peculiarities of the environment and generates itself in the shape variability and font size, in colours and in the diversity of positioning. All these elements are able to highlight an idea, functioning as statement markers (Suciu, Badea, 2018).

The last stage in configuring the credible discourse corresponds to the affirmation of the relevance of the effort made by students in order to understand and assimilate information. Focused on encouraging students by presenting the positive consequences resulting from learning as rewards, the conclusion of the pedagogical discourse plays a motivational role. The significance of relating the specific effort, on the one hand, to the set of necessary professional skills and, on the other hand, to the aspiration/desire for development/specialization reflect the correlation of the emotional and cognitive dimensions. Situated within the professional area, the mobilization for acquiring knowledge is relative to the logical area, while the connection with aspiration/desire/hope coincides with the immersion of the affective. By explicitly referring to the contribution of information in the journey from "what the student is" to "what he/she could become", the discourse aims to create the desire for action, motivation, and mobilization.

Conclusion

The student-teacher relationship is and must be favourable to the transmission of knowledge in order to train and develop skills and competencies indispensable to future specialists. The changes that have occurred in societal digitalization require a new approach in the field of education, which reveals a learning dynamics based on the complementarity of digital and non-digital communication. The exploitation of digital resources, on the one hand, and the selective and creative use of predefined structural models, on the other hand, each holds a well-defined place in the realization of a didactic discourse that ensures the successful transmission of information. In this paper, the authors have tried to answer the question regarding the contribution of human and technical components in postmodern education.

Starting from the premise of the importance of credibility in building the student-teacher relationship, the authors have analysed the pedagogical discourse as an act that updates the cognitive and emotional components, which are in a necessary balance generating credibility. Considering students' educational background and the clear definition of the purpose (in which direction the orientation is desired) as conditions for the success of the didactic act, updating them in the discourse by choosing digital resources (slidedoctremplates, images) and by applying the contrast technique, specific to the structural model of storytelling insert the subjective dimension in the discourse. The language and content strategies highlighted in the application of the discursive structural model strengthen the affective component. The role of emotion is defined in compensating the analytical component in the transmission of knowledge, likely to guarantee the success of information transfer.

Being a space for human - technology cohabitation, the pedagogical interaction updates a discourse in a permanent balance of cognition and emotion, which attests to the contribution of both to the realization of credibility. In other words, the idea can be transposed into the reclaim of the place, its mythologization by the human being (J. Campbell, 2020), who claims ownership of the digital space and transforms it from a foreign, objective, neutral, depersonalized environment into their own environment, a relevant space, investing it with meaning and conferring it with personality.

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