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DIDACTIC, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS

Verbal communication is a very important element of providing education in contemporary school systems. The impact area of verbal communication is not limited only to actions taken by a teacher; it is mainly focused on a student who is perceived by educational sciences as the primary object of all activities of didactic and educational nature. In his studies devoted to sociology of education, R. Meighan (2002) underlined that verbal communication in school is realized holistically as it comprises exchange of information on diverse levels (between a teacher and students, between students and a teacher and within the students' community). The effect of verbal communication is multivariate and it becomes especially evident in the didactic, psychological and social area.

In the simplest of interpretations, communication may be defined as a process of conveying information where there is at least one addresser and one or more addressees. Conveying is defined as the element related to the formal structure of communication, whereas information is defined as the substantial element (Retter, 2002). In many studies on the subject of verbal communication the term 'information' is used as a synonym of the term 'communicate', which may be further defined as a 'message' or, in broader terms, as a message supplemented with a particular context (2002).

In the communicative process of conveying information between an addresser and an addressee there is also present the aspect of encoding, so the process of translation focused on preserving the elements which are most important. Encoding of information performed by the addresser of a message should be understood as providing a meaning to words uttered. Decoding, on the other hand, which is performed by the addressee, consists of successful appreciation of the meaning. It needs to be emphasized that both the addresser and the addressee do not limit themselves in their communicative activities to the linguistic aspect of the message conveyed; they supplement it with different social contexts as well as subjective intentions and experiences (Retter, 2002).

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Verbal communication constitutes the basis of each school system operation. Both teaching and learning, understood as processes, are characterized by ongoing exchange of information, where the role of the addresser and the addressee interchange. According to hermeneutic theories these roles are equally attributed to teachers and students. Verbal communication models and the resulting ways of communication between a student and a teacher are to a large extent determined by typological diversity of elementary, theoretical principles on the basis of which school educational practice functions. Any attempt to standardize these principles is a difficult task, as it comes down to an attempt to define the current school theory.

Questions concerning present education lead us to ponder over the current postulates, requirements and expectations that the contemporary world, reality and society place before the school system. Gone are the days when it was expected that the educational system should merely provide the students who were subject to its influence with a generally accepted canon of knowledge and a clearly defined range of skills included in the curriculum. School is no longer perceived solely as an institution implementing the planned process of teaching and education.

Today we expect much more from a school than transmission of knowledge as recommended in Herbart's pedagogy. One of the greatest challenges that a school is faced with is to prepare members of school community to life, to function in the world which is characterized by unprecedented dynamics of change which occur in almost every sphere and area of human life as well as to participate in a society which is characterized by increasing, many-sided and multifaceted diversity.

A successful 'end result' of the education process is no longer understood as an individual who has knowledge and skills. Nowadays it is expected that such an individual shall be able to use the acquired competences in practice and find their place in dynamically changing educational, cultural and social contexts of reality, effectively using means offered by civilizational and technological development as well as their own potential and capabilities (Stróżyński, 2003).

The above-mentioned circumstances contribute to the change of didactics models. In order to present only the primary directions of change which occur in this area we may use a table which shows the most important sources of transformations, evident in selected teaching and learning approaches and relevant action models, including social practice. The table presents a diversified theoretical offer where different philosophical and ideological inspirations are reflected taking into consideration other action theories and models of improvement conditions.

Table 1. Diversification of school models

Properties – model features	Traditional school (closed model)	Modern school (open model)	Emancipation school (critical-creative model)
Educational goal	Student's role is fixed, pedagogy of knowledge transfer	Supporting a student in their development, pedagogy of knowledge development and change	Improving the quality of life and contributing to life change (emancipation) by questioning and critical approach to the world. Pedagogy of critics and knowledge creation
Concept of knowledge	An objective world of human mind products – cumulated and verified	Knowledge as the ability to act and solve problems, society exists through communication	Society exists thanks to knowledge which is a condition and way of participating in the world; Knowledge is shared, maintained and created in relations with the world
Didactics	Instrumental	Humanistic (pragmatism)	Critical (phenomenology)
Substance of teaching	Contents of the teaching process selected from the entire human achievement – valuable for the preparation of future generations	Knowledge comes from experience – it serves the development of individual potential and shaping of individuality and maturity	Producing the ability to understand, explain and deal with the world (where freedom is dominated by market and exchange and is reduced to consumer's freedom)
Concept of teaching process	Transmission of knowledge. A result-oriented process	Teaching how to learn – knowledge includes consideration over cognitive strategies. A process-oriented and person-oriented model	Liberation from the constraints of ratified forms of social life – criticism of knowledge. Focus on the quality of the world where one lives
Role of a teacher	A master who provides sure solutions for successful operation, a person managing knowledge	An advisor, facilitator, educator, partner	An animator, a participant of a critical dialogue

Role of a student	A learning individual	An active individual who uses knowledge and experience when levelling the difference between the existing and the desired level of skills/competence. A rational, free and responsible subject	An active creator of a "microcosm" obtaining and increasing their self-awareness and improving their own life
Concept of verbal communication	One-way message transmission. Transfer of information	Exchange of messages in an open dialogue. Information incrementation	Multi-dimensional exchange of messages, a dialogical process. Pragmatic exploration of information

Source: study of author.

The issues discussed so far predominantly refer to diverse aspects of verbal communication in the context of school theory. A question about the presence of the quoted solutions in educational practice implemented by schools on everyday basis is fully justified. A diagnosis of the verbal communication model used in school reality and the effectiveness of the existing communication processes is a task which goes beyond the subject of this article as it requires planning a detailed research study and careful analysis focused on parametrization of the phenomenon of information exchange which happens every day in school reality.

Parametrization is not a new concept in modern educational systems. In fact, it constitutes a specific summary of results of the carried-out measurement of didactic achievements of students, evaluations of didactic and educational activities executed by teachers, as well as a summary of indicators valorising the educational practice characterizing a given school. A classic example of educational system parametrization is the measurement of didactic achievements of students which comes down to a very practical system of assessment where verbal communication plays an incredibly important role. In numerous studies on educational diagnostics evaluation of students' performance is perceived as an activity comprising student's results determination and the communication of these results to a particular student (Stróżyński, 2004). Communicating a mark is a sort of pedagogical utterance which should not be limited merely to the physical school mark. Messages addressed by the teachers to the students, which may be in written or oral form, are a special form of providing assessment.

Communicating a mark may be described as an interpersonal communication act which takes place between a teacher and a student and is aimed at informing a student about achieved results which constitute the outcome of a previously carried out measurement of knowledge gained and skills mastered by the student. This

final step of the assessment process determines how a student will interpret the mark and decides whether a student will understand and accept it. The manner in which a teacher communicates marks to their students has a strong influence on the effectiveness and quality of information perception; it affects the emotional attitude to the evaluation process, stimulates or hinders students' motivation to undertake further educational activity, shapes relations between a teacher and a student as well as relations within the students' community. Diversifying the manner in which marks are communicated may provoke radically different attitudes of the students both towards the evaluation process and towards a teacher, towards the school as an institution and towards learning itself.

As B. Niemierko (2009) underlines, as far as school reality is concerned, the manner of communicating a mark to a student is as important as its value. In a situation where a student receives a negative mark understood as a mark whose value is not satisfactory for a student for various reasons, then the further actions taken by such a student shall to a large extent depend on the manner in which the teacher communicated the mark. Will the student interpret a negative mark as a form of punishment for not having mastered the assigned material well enough? Or, perhaps, the student shall see it as a guideline showing which areas of knowledge or kinds of skills require further effort in order to be mastered on a satisfactory level?

Communicating a mark to a student is a process, which is affected by a range of different factors which contribute to the specific atmosphere prevailing in a particular school, in a particular grade, or during particular classes; it is created both by a teacher and his students. The concept of school atmosphere which appears quite frequently in different psychological and pedagogical discourses lacks precise and concrete definition. It functions on the level of vernacular and is subject to rather intuitive interpretation. Links connecting the idea of school atmosphere with many other functional terms, issues and aspects reveals heterogeneity of the concept as well as the abundance of both theoretical and research approaches. Regardless of difficulties connected with making an attempt to formulate a relevant definition, the following constitutive qualities of school atmosphere should be listed: the nature and specificity of relations between a teacher and students, determined particularly by the level of mutual trust, acceptance and readiness to cooperate.

Highlighting the role and significance of trust and cooperation in relations between communicating people, S. R. Covey (2012) distinguishes three different levels of interpersonal verbal communication (Figure 1). This approach may be defined as interactive as the increase of trust level and cooperation level has an effect on communication level, making it better and more effective; the level of communication, on the other hand, and its increase in particular, helps to build greater trust and more successful cooperation.

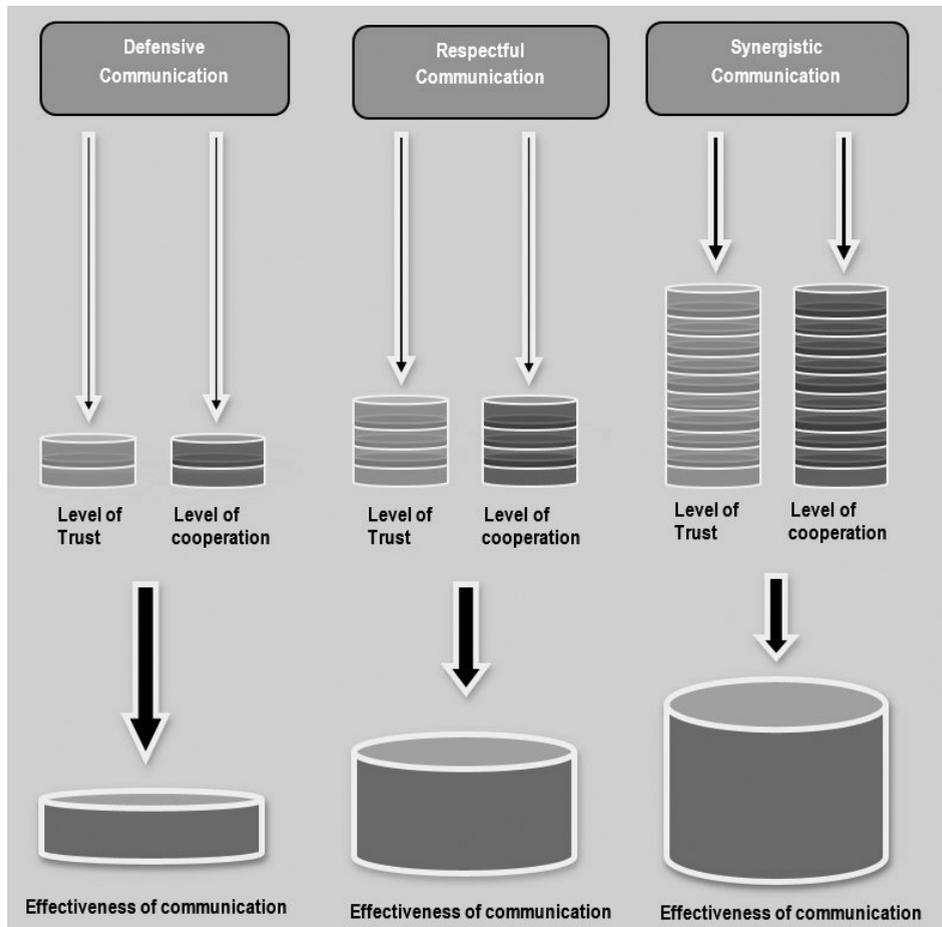


Figure 1. Diversification of interpersonal communication levels by R. S. Covey
 Source: study of author on the basis of: J. Stewart (2007).

Low trust level between the participants of an interpersonal communication act results in lower communication level, which Covey refers to as 'defensive'. The person conveying a message does not trust that the addressee or addressees are genuinely willing to receive the information; moreover, the person often does not believe that the addressees are able to correctly understand the message addressed to them. The addressees, however, perceive the conveyed message as unimportant, they do not believe in the reliability or usefulness of the information and try to remember and understand only as much as they believe necessary to remain safe. The defensive level of interpersonal communication creates a certain interdependence: usually, the addresser intentionally does not include everything that they could in their message, the addressees, on the other hand, acquire much less information from such a message than possible considering their perceptive capabilities.

As far as school reality is concerned, the defensive model of interpersonal communication occurs when a teacher is unable to properly assess the potential and capabilities of his students, when he stereotypically differentiates students as more and less apt, marginalizes the position of those who usually *don't perform well* and when students perceive their teacher as an incompetent person who does not have anything valuable to offer. In the context of a school, defensive communication very often resembles a kind of struggle for dominant position and final victory which is understood as forcing the other party to be more engaged in the performed communicative acts. If the teacher wins, he will force his students to be more attentive when receiving his messages and to remember all the conveyed information. If students win, however, the teacher will be forced to reduce the contents of conveyed communicates and to minimize his requirements for the students.

Covey (2012) refers to the second and higher level of interpersonal communication as respectful. As far as this model is concerned, communication is based on mutual respect and the addresser takes into consideration the possibilities and capabilities of the addressees of a message. The addresser has a certain information resource which he is ready to convey and he adjusts the amount of conveyed information depending on the circumstances and conditions on the addressees' part.

In school reality, a compromise in the area of communication between a teacher and his students would entail conscious limitation of information conveyed by the educator, taking into consideration the fact that not all contents would be interesting for the students and that they have the right to reduce the load that they are burdened with. Having the minimum of information which ensures that they feel safe at school, the students, by way of compromise reached together with an educator who appreciated their capabilities, are ready to increase the amount of received information and thus create a communication model satisfactory for both sides. In the case of the respectful model of interpersonal communication both the addresser and the addressee do not use their communicative potential to the fullest. In contrast to the defensive model, however, there exists a thread of mutual cooperation which is evident as greater understanding of messages and a more effective, common performance of educational tasks. Actually, the level of respectful communication is achievable in every school and it constitutes a sort of communicational standard which is sufficient in order to ensure proper functioning in school and social life.

The third, and last, level of interpersonal communication is called synergistic. Synergistic interpersonal communication relies on mutual openness of both parties – both the addresser and the addressee – and on high level of mutual trust which implies highly successful cooperation. In this model, the addresser conveys to the listeners all the information which he is able to share. The addressees, on the other hand, receive all the information, understand it and, moreover, enrich it with their own reflections and considerations which they later on share with the addresser of the message but also with one another. On this level of interpersonal communication, the roles of an addresser and an addressee are actually interchangeable, which

promotes creative thinking and reflection as well as enhances the effectiveness of undertaken actions.

As far as contemporary schools are concerned, the synergistic communication model is hard to attain, but it is not impossible. The synergistic level of communication could occur if a teacher, aware of his students' abilities and predispositions, adopted and consistently used such a teaching method which enabled the students to best understand and remember conveyed information. Openness and readiness to discuss with the students about the material covered and actions undertaken would reinforce mutual trust, build effective cooperation between a teacher and his students and, thus, maximize educational effectiveness.

In the light of demands regarding communication which are addressed to schools, measurement of students' educational achievements should take the form of supportive evaluation which – while reflecting a given student's level of knowledge and acquired skills – simultaneously provides information necessary to support the student in their comprehensive development. The concept of development should be perceived in its broad meaning including both the educational level, where the effects of didactic and educational actions are visible, being a result of educational practice implemented by a school, and the social level.

Effective use of verbal communication in the educational measurement of student's achievements allows, first of all, to determine the level of acquired knowledge and mastered skills while showing the student which tasks he or she has performed correctly and which areas require further improvement according to guidelines provided by a teacher. Hence, in the field of didactics, effective communication of school marks enhances the diagnostic, informative and instructive function of a school mark. In the field of education, on the other hand, the processes of verbal communication focus around the issues of affirmation and student motivation with the purpose of initiating further educational activity. As far as social impacts are concerned, properly channelled verbal communication in the context of the performed didactic measurement first of all serves the purpose of building and maintaining proper relations between a teacher and students.

Perceiving the process of assessing students' school achievements as a communicative act which takes place during educational practice and whose direct participants are a teacher and students implies a need to find an interpersonal communication model which could serve as a theoretical base for the determination of a proper process of communicating a school mark; Implementation of the assumptions of such a model would enable to endow the consequences of the impact of a mark with supportive qualities.

One of the examples which could serve as a specific theoretical background for the appropriate process of communicating supportive assessment is R. Jakobson's (1989) interpersonal communication model.

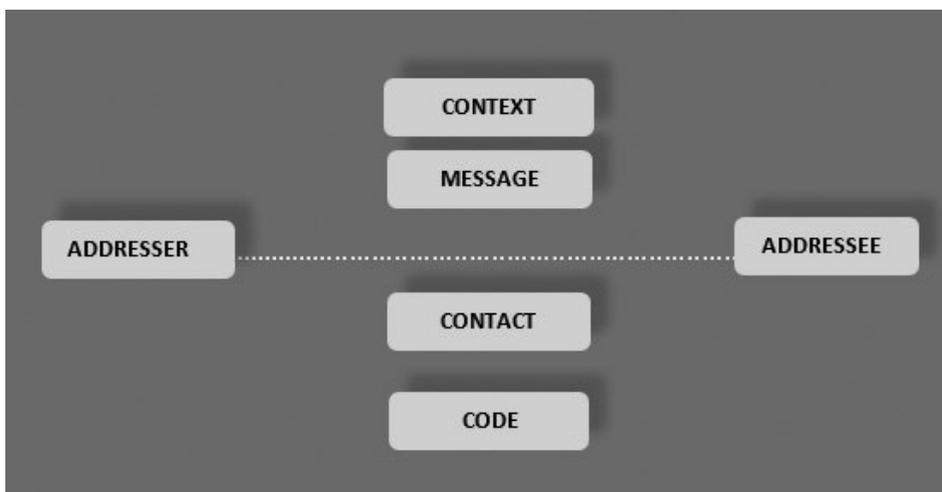


Figure 2. R. Jakobson's interpersonal communication model
Source: R. Jakobson (1989).

The constitutive and functional elements of this model include: the addresser and the addressee, the message, the context – which may be understood either as the contents of the message or as a set of circumstances in which communication takes place – the contact which needs to take place between the addresser and the addressee in order to exchange information and the code – so the system of signs used to convey information which exists in the minds of the communicating individuals and in the space between them.

The construction and functionality of Jakobson's interpersonal communication model make it a perfect pattern for communicating a mark in a supportive way for at least two reasons: first of all, according to Jakobson (1989) the following factors determine the effectiveness of communication:

- setting the message in the semantic context understandable to the addressee, verbalized or possible to verbalize;
- the code should be fully or at least partially common for the addresser and the addressee;
- contact between the addresser and the addressee should be understood as a physical channel and a mental connection enabling the initiation and continuation of information exchange.

Second of all, Jakobson's concept of interpersonal communication understood as a process of information exchange between the participants of a communication act fulfils six typologically diversified functions whose implementation may determine functional effectiveness of the supportive assessment being communicated.

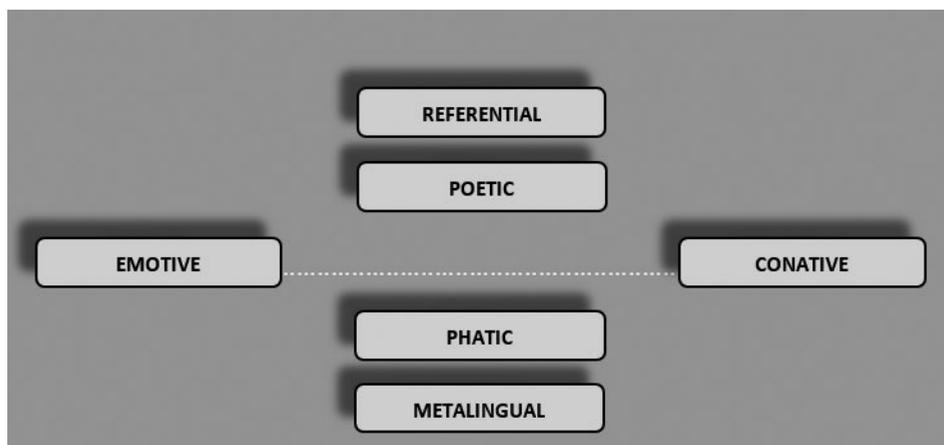


Figure 3. Function diversification in R. Jakobson's interpersonal communication model
 Source: study of author on the basis of: R. Jakobson (1989).

Summarizing the above elaboration, it may be concluded that both the components of R. Jakobson's interpersonal communication model and the linguistic functions included in it show certain synergy of relations as compared to the principles of students' assessment of supportive nature. Implementation of this communication model also allows to put into practice a number of functions important from the point of view of pedagogical actions which a school executes within its everyday educational practice as regards the didactic, educational and social dimension (Table 2).

Table 2. Verbal communication models in the context of educational operations executed by schools

Aspect of a school's educational operation	Pedagogical function	Type of message (teacher – student)	R. Jakobson's concept of communication	Communication function
Educational	Motivational (motivating to take up further educational activities by highlighting well mastered knowledge and skills, appreciating success and building a student's good self-esteem)	<i>I believe that such a talented student as you are, will manage to do task Y</i>	The goal of the message is to focus on the addresser and to show the speaker's attitude towards the contents of the message	Emotive

Didactic	Diagnostic (check of a student's knowledge and achievements enhanced with diagnosis of problematic areas)	<i>You have mastered X, but Y still needs to be improved</i>	The goal of the message is to present objects and factual circumstances, so a description and presentation of facts	Referential
	Informative (informs about the level of knowledge apprehension and mastering of skills)	<i>Do you have any questions about the material we have covered so far?</i>	Focus on proper reception and understanding of the message, reinforces the informative dimension	Metalingual
	Instructive (teacher's guidelines and tips determining a given student's further actions)	<i>If you don't master skill A, solving task B will cause you trouble</i>	The goal of the message is to influence the addressee and his behaviour	Conative
	Affirmative (appreciation of a student's progress, commitment and achievements made in the course of undertaken educational activities)	<i>You have dealt with task X very well, you are a very talented student</i>	Appropriate use of language from the point of view of the message conveyed, actions with signs which co-create the semantic model, relevant choice of words, comparisons, hyperbole, metaphors	Poetic
Social	Relational (building a relation between a student and a teacher which is aimed at directing the student's actions in a way supporting his development)	<i>I expect that you will prepare better for our classes next week</i>	The goal is to establish and retain contact and prolong the communication act	Phatic

Source: study of author.

The R. Jakobson's model used in this article is one of many examples of interpersonal verbal communication models whose theoretical assumptions and functional premises could help to increase the level of educational services provided by contemporary schools. The didactic, educational and social dimensions of the influence of verbal communication make it one of the most important elements of the teaching and learning process which certainly requires further analysis and attention especially in the context of actions taken with the view to modernize the present school system.

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Keywords: verbal communication, school educational practice, teacher, student

Abstract: Verbal communication is the basis of each school system. Both teaching and learning, understood as processes, are characterized by ongoing exchange of information. In his paper the author draws attention to the influence of communication processes on several areas of pedagogical activity, particularly on the didactic, educational and social area. The question raised and solutions suggested in the article are aimed at encouraging the reader to undertake further analysis over the role and meaning of verbal communication in educational practice executed by contemporary schools.

DYDAKTYCZNO-WYCHOWAWCZE I SPOŁECZNE WYMIARY KOMUNIKACJI JĘZYKOWEJ W TEORII I PRAKTYCE EDUKACYJNEJ WSPÓŁCZESNEJ SZKOŁY

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja językowa, praktyka edukacyjna szkoły, nauczyciel, uczeń

Streszczenie: Komunikacja językowa stanowi podstawę każdego systemu szkolnictwa. Zarówno nauczanie, jak i uczenie się, rozumiane jako procesy, charakteryzuje bowiem nieustanna wymiana informacji. W artykule autor zwraca uwagę na oddziaływanie procesów komunikacyjnych w wielu wymiarach pedagogicznego działania, w szczególności zaś w wymiarze dydaktycznym, wychowawczym oraz społecznym. Podjęta problematyka oraz proponowane w artykule rozwiązania mają za zadanie zachęcić czytelnika do głębszego namysłu nad rolą i znaczeniem komunikacji językowej w praktyce edukacyjnej, jaką realizuje współczesna szkoła.