

A Participative Approach to Teaching and Learning in Higher School

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Abstract: The paper introduces a participative approach to teaching in higher school. Much attention is paid to the theoretical background of pedagogical communication. The authors describe different classifications of styles of teacher-student interaction. The importance of the democratic style of communication as an integral condition for applying the participative approach to teaching is drawn special attention to. The approach is combined with the vitagennaya technology which emphasizes learning through individual experience. The parameters of learning technologies are clearly identified in the article. The authors describe the favorable conditions, structure of the technology and the parts of the monitoring process. The approach focuses mainly on the collaboration between a student and a teacher. It is expected that it could contribute to the continuous improvement of teaching practices in higher school.

Key words: Participative approach • Pedagogical communication • Leadership styles • Active dialogue • technology • Monitoring • Vitagennaya technology • Collaboration • Reflexive teachers • Holographic approach • Professional development • Teaching skills

INTRODUCTION

The paper investigates a participative approach to teaching higher school students. As teaching nowadays would require tutors to have the ability and pedagogical skills to combine new technologies with the traditional ones, the proposed approach can be used as a means of facilitating not only professional development of the teachers themselves but also pedagogical communication. Teachers are expected to work paying more attention to students' autonomy and independence. E-learning, information communication technologies create unbelievable opportunities for education and development. But the role of the teacher as a facilitator of the process should not be underestimated. In the era of digitization it is the time to question the old values of traditional forms of education but on the other hand student- teacher collaboration can be mutually beneficial. A special role in the educational process is given to the creation of favorable conditions for teachers to help students be engaged on equal basis, as an active partner in communication.

Pedagogical Communication: Nowadays it is vitally important to renew the teacher-student communication style as new digital forms require new approaches not only to the process of teaching but also to the way of interacting. Pedagogical communication is known to be the interaction between a teacher and a student to achieve certain educational goals. The ultimate result should be mutual professional and personal development.

The basic forms of pedagogical communication are known to be monologue, dialogue, discussion. A monologue is the least effective form of interaction as more than 50% of the information is unlikely to be perceived. In an active dialogue the teacher is open to interaction. The first experimental study of styles communication and group dynamics was conducted by Lewin K. [1]. In collaboration with Lippitt R. they looked at three classic group leadership models-democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire-and concluded that a greater positive impact on behavior (more creativity, productivity, involvement, friendliness, less aggression) was observed in groups with democratic style which is

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based on an active dialogue. By contrast, there was more hostility and aggression in groups with the other two styles. After a series of experiments with children as a target group Lewin K. concluded:

There have been few experiments for me as impressive as seeing the expression in children's faces during the first day of autocracy. The friendly, open and cooperative group, full of life became within a short half an hour a rather apathetic looking gathering without initiative [2].

The basic classification into three types opens up opportunities for more detailed classifications. For example, Stolyarenko [3] classifies pedagogical communication into 6 main groups:

- Autocratic which is characterized by total control and supervision on behalf of a teacher who sets strict rules and regulations to follow. Students are deprived of the opportunity to be engaged into direct dialogue with the teacher
- Authoritarian which allows students to share their points of view but this is the teacher who takes the final decision
- Democratic which is based on an active dialogue between the teacher and the students. The function of the teacher is to understand and persuade the students.
- Ignoring which is characterized by the teacher's autonomy and the formal approach to teaching. The teacher does not interfere with students' environment.
- Permissive when the teacher keeps himself aloof from the group
- Illogical when the teacher does not follow one particular style but a combination of them according to the circumstances. Such an approach leads to disorganization and interpersonal conflicts.

Kan-Kalik [4] singles out 5 basic styles of pedagogical communication. The communication can be generated by different factors and techniques: professional values; friendly relationships; distance; flirting.

The participative approach analyzed in this paper must be based on the democratic style of communication. Isayev [5] points out the importance of a dialogue as an integral condition of creating the situation of partnership in a student's friendly environment. This strategy requires the switch from authoritarian position to cooperation and co-creation.

Analyzing the problem of pedagogical communication Sen'ko [6] makes the conclusion that the shift from the old type of communication to a new one is possible if subject knowledge is filled with personal meaning.

The concept of learning through experience is not new. Kolb [7] was one of the first to model the educational process into a formal cycle which he called "experimental learning cycle". This cycle consists of four interconnected processes "concrete experiencing of an experience", "reflective observation", "abstract conceptualization", "active experimentation" [7]. Gibbs [8] developed the idea and proposed a six-stage reflective cycle including the following stages: description-feelings-evaluation-analysis-conclusion-action plan. At each stage a teacher is supposed to ask himself particular questions to solve the tasks which are predetermined by each stage. For example, at the stage of feeling one should ask himself "What was I thinking or feeling?". The ability of a person to assess and self-monitor his activity in order to improve it is known to be a basic component of professional culture (reflexive component). There are many researches devoted to the analysis of reflexive activities as it plays an important role in molding reflexive teachers and practitioners [9].

Such reflexive technologies can facilitate the process of solving various pedagogical and educational tasks. The process of teaching and learning could and must be structured. Actually it requires structured conditions to encourage it [9]. Structurizing and modeling are known to be based on certain technologies.

The Methodology of the Participative Approach:

Throughout the twentieth century, there were many attempts in the world pedagogy to "technologize" learning process and there were two lines of research and practical developments. One of them (the original) is connected with the use of technology in learning. The second one is special, "technological" approach to education in general. Technological approach to education is aimed at constructing the learning process taking into account the initial requirements (social order, educational standards, objectives and content of education).

According to Heron [10] a model of learning process includes four basic ways of acquiring knowledge: experimental knowing through participating in the process; presentational knowing through perceiving the arts, different patterns and forms,

nonverbal presentations, dreams and memory; propositional knowing based on language perception; practical knowing elaborated with skills and competencies. What makes this classification important for our analysis is the fact that learning through experience is regarded as one of the most essential ways of getting knowledge. Sharing the same experience the participants of the education process can support each other [11].

To participate means to take part or have a share [12]. In our study we will use the terms "participative" and consider it as an alternative to authoritarianism in education pedagogical process. The basis for a teacher's professional culture must be his own "pedagogical philosophy" [13]. The pedagogical activity must be based on the "individual reflexive model" the psychological ground of which is "I-concept". Only this model can make a teacher be empathic, emotional, creative and supportive [13]. These qualities are essential for teachers wishing to apply a participative approach into their teaching practices.

Participative approach as a practice-oriented tactics of subject-subject interaction in the educational system involves solving problems based on the participation and involvement of students on an equal basis. Following Nikitina [14], we believe that the application of a participative approach to teaching will mean:

- The right to have one's own opinion in doing tasks and assignments;
- Counseling, seeking agreement between the teacher and students;
- Pedagogical communication on the basis of parity and tolerance and voluntary participation.

The above mentioned approach from our point of view focuses not only on the fact of a joint solution of educational problems by teachers and students, but also identifies the essential features that characterize their interaction: the search for agreement by negotiation and consultation on the principles of voluntariness, parity and tolerance. Vazina [15] emphasizes that "the self-actualization of potential participants in the educational process is effective in case of their interaction on the type of dialogue (dialogic interaction). The importance of this idea was emphasized by Sync [16] who stresses the necessity of systematic application of the approach. Otherwise, occasional use of a participative approach leads to the perception of "participation" as a game.

Using such an approach the teacher is supposed not to dominate the process like an in autocratic leadership style but delegate the responsibility for the decision making process to the student. It is significantly important for a teacher to develop particular skills and competencies to motivate students to think aloud and support their arguments. The teacher acts not only as a facilitator but also as a moderator of the discussion letting the participants have their say. The experience of using the approach indicates the necessity to improve the skills for building a good platform for teacher-students collaboration. According to Greenbaum [17], a moderator should be:

- Hard working
- Self-motivated and self confident
- A quick learner able to deal with large amount of information in short time
- Sociable and friendly able to establish a good rapport with people
- An effective listener knowing listening skills
- Able to concentrate and memorize large amount of information.

We interpret the term "solution" as the selection of an alternative, in this connection we connect decision making process with identifying ways to resolve problems and planning. Thus speaking about the mechanisms of decision-making within the participative approach, we can highlight an essential feature of participation-joint decision-making discussion between an instructor (facilitator/ moderator/ teacher) and student. When using the participative approach it is important to identify common areas that are crucial to address the issue at the strategic and tactical levels, avoiding the influence of individual differences in the conversation. Participation involves "interaction", not "effect" or domination of the teacher over students to develop and implement a joint solution of problems, which is known to be a pattern of the subject-subject relationship. In this regard, the mechanism of this interaction should be close to the negotiations in order to find the common ground on this educational problem, making a single coherent solution and ensure students' responsibility for the decision taken.

Vitagennaya Technology: We believe the vitagennaya technology to provide guidelines for the teachers wishing to apply the participative approach to teaching and learning practices. It is based on the following grounds:

- Holographic approach to learning proposed by Belkin [18] and being understood as the system of methods, techniques to analyze and process knowledge with the help of multidimensionality of perception and life experience
- The technology of human self-development as a spiritual-natural phenomenon worked out by K. Vazina [19]
- The participative approach to teaching and learning.

The essence of this technology is the following. Vitagennoye education [18] provides learners with the communicative function by appealing to their life (vitagenny) experience. Life experience is the information that is a mixture of thoughts, actions, feelings that are experienced by a man and associated with the memory of the mind, memory of the emotions and memory of the behavior. It is important not only to actualize and appeal to the human experience, but to help him enrich himself. The basis of the pedagogical process is the principle of cooperation and collaboration aimed at achieving the same goals:

- Development of the needs to retain favorable environment for a human being;
- Acquisition of the abilities to live a healthy life in harmony with nature;
- Awareness of the need to preserve the natural environment as the condition of a human being himself.

Cooperation includes three main components. One of them is the awareness of the common goal. This is proved by Lewin's theory of task interdependence [20]. It states that if members of the group are dependent on each other for achievement, then positive dynamics is created. Members tended to take part and communicate more in discussion were more productive compared to those working under negative task interdependence [20].

In a participative approach the goal should be achieved by student-teacher collaboration. Clear separation of co-operation, mutual assistance in carrying out the tasks contributes to the decision-making process.

According to Lewin's field theory individuals participate in a series of life spaces (work, family, school etc) and the whole "lifespace" has to be amassed and viewed to understand the behavior of an individual.

The Sources of Life Experience Are Mentioned Below:

- Socio-economic environment (activities, society, the educational process);
- Cultural and ethnographic environment (communication, the educational process, arts, literature);
- Socio-political environment (media, business communication);
- Ecological environment (activities, free communication, literature, art, the natural environment, the media, the educational process).

The role of educational process is significant in molding life experience since education is the process of forming social image of a man. Using life experience one can make education process more effective.

The conditions of using vitagenny experience as a pedagogical tool are the following:

- Forming valuable attitude to scientific knowledge;
- Valuable attitude to ignorance, i.e. lack of information;
- Establishing a view of the multidimensionality of the educational process;
- Reliance on the subconscious of a personality

Given the holographic approach of vitagennoye education, the essence of natural self-reflective technology and human health preserving technology as the basis of the professional environmental education, we identified the possible parameters of learning technologies of students:

- Professional utility of the education content that stimulates and motivates students;
- Individualization of the educational process (given the practical problems of students);
- Set of methodological support (system and a modular plan, syllabus, case studies, monitoring the quality of education);
- Active forms of learning (research, professional dialogue, development projects on various aspect of management, monitoring, professional-reflexive games, etc.).

Taking into consideration these parameters, the vitagenny technology of professional education of managers was worked out. The structure of the process consists of three stages, functionally related to each other (Fig. 1).

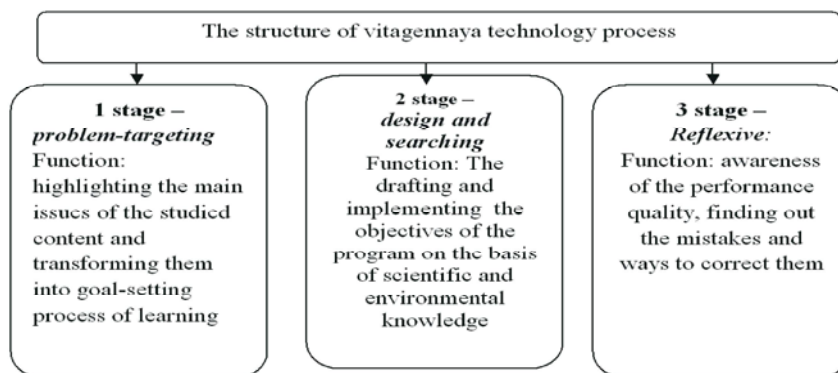


Fig. 1: The structure of the technological process of vitagennaya technology

The monitoring of vitagennaya technology will be described in details and consists of four parts.

The first part is diagnostic. The process of education starts with express diagnostics:

- The degree of students' readiness to environmental education
- Personal qualities of students which can promote (hinder) the success of training
- Type of students' relationship to subject matter
- State of health

Taking into account the diagnostics, which is held at the beginning of education process through self-assessment (as teachers do not know students yet), every student makes up a problem tree, the tree of goals and forecast of successful learning.

The second part is the introduction into the content. For example, ecological content: the methodological problems of environmental education such as the humanization of environmental education; the relationships of human-nature-society where a man is a part of nature who is to live according to its laws and logic. Violation of these laws is destructive to a human.

The aims of the introductory course are manifold. Firstly, it is to show the attitude of the educator who provides and manages the education process. Secondly, it is essentially vital to determine students' attitude to the content because it could have a positive impact on the motivation and desire to take part in the discussion. If personal experience is involved students are likely to have more motivation to discuss the problems. Thirdly, one of the steps is to discuss the similarities and differences in teacher's and students' views. Finally, it is significant to single out the most topical issues for students (vectors of the learning process). This part of the process allows the teachers to

adjust training project to the actual level of environmental education and permits students to be consciously ready to perceive the content of education.

The third part is the basic process of learning, which consists of presenting information in portions and discussion of the implementation of individual goals, solutions of the problems related to the management, selection and adjustment of means and forms of education.

The fourth part is the final one dealing with re-diagnostics. Data comparison of the first and the final diagnostics allows every student:

- To identify the degree of problem solution and realization of goals;
- To increase of environmental education level, new personal problems, issues, problems solved by the means of professional education;
- To be persuaded of the necessity to preserve their health in the process of learning.

Diagnostics allows teachers to enjoy a variety of opportunities. Firstly, it helps to assess the degree of development of each student. Secondly, it lets teachers determine the effectiveness of the system content and technological means. Thirdly, it simplifies the mechanism of identifying process control. Lastly, it gives the feedback to find out errors and their causes and ways to improve the situation. In other words, it means to identify further growth of their professional competence.

CONCLUSION

12-year testing of vitagennaya technology has shown its efficiency allowing to create favorable conditions for each student. The participative approach can be applied at every stage of the technology and

effectively used in a variety of classroom activities: role plays, case studies, dilemma-decision tasks, business games, focus groups etc. It is believed to have a positive impact on personal and professional development of both teachers and students and create a basis for their collaboration. It could be a challenging task for a teacher to apply the participative approach to teaching as it requires skills, competencies and the desire. We want to conclude the paper by quoting Lewin K [2: 82].

The change from autocracy to democracy seemed to take somewhat more time than from democracy to autocracy. Autocracy is imposed upon the individual. Democracy he has to learn.

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