Differentiated Pedagogical Mediation

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Abstract: Distance Education is an educational modality requiring fundamental elements similar to those referring to face-to-face education: a) an immanent plan – the pedagogical concept; b) an action plan – the relationship between the actors; c) a management plan – the necessary conditions. The present study has the objective to demonstrate the pedagogical differences between these two modalities. The methodology used was participating observation. The studies have shown, that the basic difference lies in the form of pedagogical mediation. The didactic organization and the movement of knowledge takes place at different times and places. Teacher and student are in different localities and times. Real face-to-face encounters are rare and on-line/virtual meetings may be synchronous or asynchronous, mediated by different means of communication. A multiprofissional team is involved, requiring cooperation, interaction and autonomy. It is concluded, that the pedagogical mediation differs from face-to-face education, in so far as it is extensive to knowledge situations previously organized in print and on-line and then developed at different times and spaces. The great challenge is to break the cultural model installed by face-to-face teaching and to operate within another relationship of didactic time and space, as well as learning. This study is part of a research project that is to construct a more pertinent pedagogical model for the teaching-learning process under DL.

Keywords: Pedagogical Mediation, Digital Communication Technologies, Distance Education

1. Introduction

The modality of Distance Education does not differ from face-to-face education in its fundamental elements, but in the mode of its pedagogical mediation. In the distance modality the didactic timing is different from the learning timing. The organization of learning situations requires a multiprofissional team, as well as other resources and means of communication [1].
A pedagogical proposal, independently of its modality, comprehends three intimately connected plans under the same dimension: the immanent plan (pedagogical concept), the action plan (relations between the actors) and the management plan (managing of the conditions that sustain the learning situations) [2].

Distance Education differs from face-to-face education by the mediation mode required in the implementation of its plans. Which means, that by the form of its organization and development, peculiar conditions are required, as regards time, space, means of communication and actors involved.

This process has its own characteristics, and this is a well known and discussed question, commented in many publications [3]. In this study, the question of pedagogical mediation is emphasized, based on systematic observations made in this area during the courses of postgraduate studies realized by teachers at the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

2. Distance Education: differentiation and repetition in three plans

Distance Education requires the same fundamental elements necessary for the modality of face-to-face education. These elements are subdivided in this study into: a) an immanent plan – the pedagogical concept; b) an action plan – relationship between the actors; c) a management plan – the conditions required.

A pedagogical concept is an absolute requirement in any educational modality. Herein it is called the immanent plan [4]. The immanent plan constitutes the theoretical-methodological basis from which emerge the postulates that orient and potentialize all aspects of organization and development with regard to the pedagogical process. It is of identical weight and importance, be it for the distance education, or for the face-to-face education modality [2].

The concept of a pedagogical proposal indicates and requires a certain plan of action. By action plan are understood the relation modes to be established during the process between the main actors. By “actors” are understood the “actantes” as mentioned by Latour [5]. In this concept, an interaction is always mediated by human and not human means. In this case, the action plan comprehends the relationships established between: the multiprofessional team, be they teachers, tutors, students, informaticitians, managers; the specificity of area of studies, or their contents, the knowledge to be developed; the resources, the media that sustain the teaching-learning situations.

In Distance Education, the immanent plan does not essentially differ from the face-to-face immanent plan. In the other plans, however, there occurs a very significant transformation. In the action plan, relationships are wider and more complex in the DL modality. In order to organize, develop and supervise the teaching-learning process, the presence of a multidisciplinary team of
professionals is required. Interaction takes place between multiprofessional teams organized around a certain purpose and extends itself in scale to a much greater population of students than in the conventional case.

In the management plan, or in the mode of organizing the didactic initiative and the learning process, spaces and times are modified, are amplified, and are reconfigured in a mediation process that is not limited to predetermined activities. The learning situations extend themselves to different materials and are ever more emphasized by the convergence of Digital Communication Technologies. The use of different means of communication and different languages project the mediation mode to learning situations that become a dynamic construction of an ascending spiral – always wider and deeper [2]. A practical example are hypertexts and the hypermedia developed for learning purposes [6].

Didactically speaking, DL is a modality that contemplates the same fundamental elements as the face-to-face modality: pedagogical concept, specific content, methodology and evaluation. It differs, however, from the face-to-face system, by the mode in which pedagogical mediation is exercised. In the DL modality teachers and students are normally at different places and times, and face-to-face encounters are rare. Consequently, mediation requires a great number of means of communication: printed material, on-line information or not, telephone, videoconferences, radio.

The multiplicity of communication conditions makes it possible to share activities with everybody involved in the process, at different as well as continuous times and places. Pedagogical mediation may extend itself to a larger number of students, as it is not centered in the person of one teacher, but multiplies into manifold learning situations.

Pedagogical interferences extend to continuous learning situations, mediated by different means of communication and guided by a multiprofessional team. The student may select the time and place to realize his work, with the exception of synchronous activities.

This signifies that the communication means and the organization of materials are of great relevance in the potentiality of pedagogic mediation in this teaching modality.

In this regard, pedagogical mediation in DL has generally developed in a more complex way than conventional teaching. We have at hand a continuous process, realized in multiple contexts and that requires other forms of language and other resources of communication. On-line mediation necessitates specific criteria for the selection and elaboration of didactic materials, a system of processual supervision and evaluation. Learning situations are examined which require more flexibility and spontaneity in the flow of information and the modes of communication.

In DL the learning movement does not depend on the immediate interference of the teacher, but essentially on how the learning situations are presented to the students, and how these place themselves in the mediation process, how they organize their places, their times and their learning procedures.
As a consequence, the learning situations must be expressed in the didactic material in an accessible mode, clearly stated, be motivating and adapted for easy assimilation and execution. The learning movement is carried out in the interaction between the students and learning object (contents), expressed in the printed didactic material or on-line.

In a pedagogical proposal in the DL modality, the teacher-author organizes and arranges learning situations within a specific didactic timing, tied to the period of elaboration of the didactic material. The teaching initiative extends into the different learning situations and is mediated not only by the teacher, but also by the teacher-tutor, by a multiprofessional team, including the area of information and communication, united in a Teaching-Learning Virtual Environment – TLVE [1]. The didactic procedures [13] for DL are foreseen and expressed in the material. The students move themselves at differentiated learning times, without the face-to-face intervention of the teacher. The teacher-tutor, on the other hand, motivates and supervises the students during the implementation of the course. The multidisciplinary team distributes and feeds the communication web, thus sustaining the TLVE.

The process mediation is thus concentrated in the TLVE and in the printed material made available, which requires a diversified and flexible forecast of intensified contents and activities, offering the students alternatives for autonomous [7] insertion in the pedagogical relationship.

Cyberculture [9] is represented by an assembly of techniques, of materials, of attitudes, of thinking behaviour, of values, which present themselves to grow exponentially together with the development of cyberspace. At each instance, new actors come into the picture, new information is injected in the web; the more this space becomes wider and wider, the more the actors are transformed.

The presence or absence of any form of communication comes back to a certain social group and locates it in time and space, giving it a certain identity or a certain mode of behaviour. It is possible for a person to be here in actual presence and virtually in any other place in real time, conferring on him or on her, another feature of being in this world.[8] The same knowledge may be accessed, in the same space and at the same time, by different forms of communication, by any number of persons, and suffer interference from these, being substantially changed in its significance [10]. Digital language comprises all forms of communication, be it orally, in writing, by images, by sound, by colour, by actions, by feelings and values, converging to the same space and at any time [11].

It is inferred that the speed and form, in which information is organized, selected, transmitted and accessed, that these will change relationships producing profound implications in the intersections between philosophy, science and the arts; between the way of behaviour, of knowledge and of learning. Although research shows [14], that direct access to the digital information system is still restricted to a reduced number of persons, in one way or the other, all are tied to this system of communication, as there is a process of profound transformation under way, that reaches every instance of production of the human existence.
In this regard, a DL modality mediated by a TLVE, may contemplate a teaching-learning process, based on a fluid, dynamic, transversal and rather creative movement. The possibility of operating a teaching-learning process under the dynamics of multireferentiality [10] is more objective, than under the face-to-face mode.

The pedagogical process of Distance Education, mediated by a Virtual Teaching-Learning Environment justifies itself by its own dynamics and with no precedents in the history of handling teaching-learning.

3. Conclusion

The first part of this study was concluded under the Thesis denominated TERTIUM, defended in 2001. From that starting point, other developments took place, like the present approach, which proposes to demonstrate the differentiation between pedagogical mediation in face-to-face teaching and pedagogical mediation in distance education, as well as the possibilities of each, in meeting today’s challenges of the processes of constructing knowledge under any teaching modality. Pedagogical mediation in Distance Education requires in a certain way to get away from the face-to-face model, but it does not eliminate the basic principles of pedagogy, confirming the need for knowing and for a handling of knowing. Of these, the most important one is the one, that indicates that the quality of any educative process emerges from the internal congruence of its fundamental elements, herein presented under three plans: the immanent plan, the action plan and the management plan, subject to continuous improvement.

References