

FROM TEACHING BUILT ON UNDERSTANDING TO TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

This paper suggests an analysis of a core element of the lucid, responsible, consistent didactic act, which rigorously follows its meaning - the process of understanding: on the one hand, we draw attention to the arguments of the need for teaching based on understanding (see also the influences of the perceived curriculum), understood as a teaching that is built on the clarity that the teacher has and develops on the complex processes that this activity implies, as well as on the ways to influence learning (see the implications of teaching ethics); on the other hand, the paper emphasizes the process of understanding as a meaning of teaching - what the literature calls teaching for understanding - with the role of supporting the understanding of what students learn.

Keywords: teaching; understanding; curriculum; learning.

Introduction

The types of change that are taking shape in all areas of life are forcing the school and teachers to look more closely at their actions to honor their mission. In a world that is always under the sign of uncertainty and change, teachers establish their own teaching architectures to support the preparation of young people for the challenges of the world in which they live and will live, a world in which "change has become a constant."

People around the world are going through a difficult stage today, dominated by the pandemic that has greatly affected school life; but it was this that forced us to adapt, to learn, to change something in our own mentalities. Moreover, in these conditions we are talking about the quality of education.

The specialized literature (see Cristea 2019, Caciuc 2014, Jeder 2014) indicates that the teacher himself is, for the most part, responsible for the quality of the educational act. And as its main activity is teaching, it needs constant reassessments of the action itself as well as the results it supports.

Understood as “a complex set of specific didactic actions and behaviors, destined to produce learning” (Ceghit, 2008) or “the action of formative communication of the pedagogical / didactic message, designed according to the objectives of the training activity, realized at the level of the common repertoire between teachers and students. , which aims at immediate and medium and long-term learning, regulated / self-regulated by continuous evaluation of results ”(Cristea, 2019, p.35) teaching is essential in carrying out the quality training approach.

The basis of teaching (training, in general) is the understanding seen as "the process of having a clear and accurate idea of a thing / to penetrate, to comprehend with the mind, to understand" (DEX, 2007) or, as J. Habermas states in the theory of communicative action "the result of an interaction between interlocutors which, in the end, gives the same meaning to an expression." Preceding from H. Gardner's statement that the great problems of education systems start from the fact that teachers are not interested in how much students understand from the school curriculum " (Gardner, 2007), to which we add that, in turn , teachers must be concerned with understanding what the act of teaching entails; we emphasize the idea that understanding is a very important concept when we talk about education. We cannot say that we understand anything unless we can engage in wise, fluent, flexible and appropriate knowledge, especially in various contexts. (Wiggins, 1993, p. 200) We cannot be said to understand something unless we can employ our knowledge wisely, fluently, flexibly, and aptly in particular and diverse contexts.(ibidem)

Starting from this statement, we try a report / analysis to the teaching activity of the teacher, following two points of analysis:

- teaching based / built on understanding - seen as a teaching that is built on the clarity that the teacher has and develops on the complex processes that this activity implies, as well as on the ways to influence learning;

-teaching for understanding, as it is called in the literature, which has the role of supporting the understanding of what is learned by students.

We intend to present some essential aspects that underline the need for a more consistent attention to teaching and understanding.

Teaching based / built on understanding

Most of the times, (it can be seen in the examples above), the literature presents teaching from the perspective of its purpose and finality, that of triggering and supporting learning and, we believe, focuses less on aspects related to teaching learning. (how and what they learn about how teaching is done) by teachers both in the initial training stages in the theoretical courses and in the pedagogical practice, but also during the continuous training. How and what do teachers understand about what they have to do in the teaching activity? How practiced is the practice of critical reflection of one's own teaching activities? How important are the ways to master and deeply understand the content to be taught, the creation of an adequate environment in the classroom or the transposition / didactic transposition, the support practices offered to the students etc.?

We will focus on some important aspects that teachers need to build their teaching.

What is understanding and how do teachers relate to it?

Analyzing this process, Raymond S. Nickerson, (see *Understanding Understanding*, 1985) states the following: “At root, understanding is a true paradox: the more one learns about some aspect of the world, the more aware one is likely to become of the depth of one's ignorance of it. That does not necessarily mean that as a consequence of learning, one's understanding actually decreases, but simply that one's appreciation of the complexity of that aspect of the world is likely to increase — which may be, after all, a better understanding of a fundamental sort. . Certainly, what it means to understand is itself much more complex than it might at first appear. But recognition of this fact may be a step in the direction of better understanding not only what it means to understand but also how to promote understanding more effectively and how to determine the extent to which understanding has been attained. ” (Nickerson, 1985, pp. 236)

In its complexity, the understanding has multiple meanings, among which: “to notice the existence of a connection between the new knowledge and the set of the old knowledge; to establish effectively, sometimes quickly, the nature and significance of this link; to frame and incorporate the new knowledge into the old ones, which, in this way, are modified and enriched. (Zlate, M, 2009) Comprehension remains the process by which individuals construct meaning from information and form new “schemata” through specific activities (Crowl et al., 1997), including, but not limited to,

- generating and answering questions that demand higher order thinking about old and new ideas;

- confronting conflicting ideas and information, problems, or dilemmas;
- exploring and making discoveries;
- conducting systematic inquiries;
- summarizing, reciting, and discussing new ideas and their relationships;
- relating new understandings to other concepts;
- applying new ideas and information in basic problem-solving activities; or
- reflecting and verbalizing about cognitive processes involved in comprehension. ” (F.J.

King, L. Goodson, M.S.Faranak Rohani, p. 12)

Therefore, teachers need to be concerned with the process of deep understanding in order not to contribute and maintain functional illiteracy, a phenomenon encountered quite often worldwide and seen as someone's inability to understand what one read, to use as a resource the ideas presented in the success of an action or the superficial understanding of a content of ideas in a text.

Teaching strategies are responsible for these limitations in learning, the maintenance of students' inability to make connections between new and assimilated content, the inability to formulate their own views and present them to others orally or in writing, adding to them. - those to have logical reasoning, problem solving or lack of so-called computational skills. So what does a beginner teacher need to understand about teaching? We believe that these few aspects are important in supporting an effective activity:

The first question that beginner teachers have to ask themselves is: How well do they understand what I teach / the content to be taught? A reflection on the levels of understanding of the content as a whole, then of the topic to be taught, eliminates the situations in which the contents are memorized and then only delivered to the students. In this context, we recall the statement of John Milton Gregory: "Imperfect knowledge is reflected in imperfect teaching." Thus, if the mastery / knowledge of the contents to be taught is fundamental, it must be understood that not everyone who knows the subject can teach, because this “produced knowledge (scientific knowledge) is not automatically learnable. In order to be learned, it must be reconstructed: selected, organized, recoded, adapted to the characteristics of the students, assimilated, evaluated, certified, transferred. Didactics is the reconstruction of scientific knowledge to be learnable. A difficult process that few teachers do properly. ” (M. Miclea, 2011, p.16). It is therefore necessary to master the art of transposition or transposition teaching, along with methodological skills.

Teaching is an action that is not limited to presenting / delivering content to students. Teachers' knowledge of the teaching process must also extend to the factors that influence the learning process.

Proposing *A Model for Great Teaching*, Robert Coe considers necessary the following:

1. understand the content they are teaching and how it is learnt;
2. create a supportive environment for learning;
3. manage the classroom to maximise the opportunity to learn;
4. present content, activities and interactions that activate their students' thinking (Coe, 2020).

In this context, we believe that there is an urgent need for a process of empowering teachers to understand in detail how meaningful teaching can be achieved, which supports visible thinking, understanding-based learning, visible learning.

Teaching for understanding

Teaching to support knowledge is different from teaching for understanding which is the basis of authentic learning, visible thinking and also visible learning. Teaching for understanding emphasizes the triad - knowledge, thinking and understanding. The phrase "teaching for understanding" is promoted in the well-known Project Zero proposed by a group of researchers from Harvard Graduate School of Education whose mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking and creativity in art, as well as in humanistic and scientific disciplines, in a formal and informational context and at individual, group and institutional level".

The researchers focused on a few key questions: "What does it mean to understand something? How do students develop understanding? How can teachers know how well they understand and support the development of understanding?"

Practices to support teaching for understanding are summarized in a few ideas, as follows:

- „Choose topics that engage student interest and connect readily to other subjects.
- Set coherent unit and course goals.
- Create activities that develop and demonstrate students' understanding.
- Improve student performance by providing continual feedback.” (Blythe, 1998)

David Perkins (1997) argues that: "Teaching for understanding does not aim at radical burn-the-bridges innovation, just more and better versions of the best we usually see." ; To support comprehension-based learning, it also offers some suggestions: “make learning a long-term, thinking-centered process; provide for rich ongoing assessment; support learning with

powerful representations; pay heed to developmental factors. induct students into the discipline; Teach for transfer, ”

Therefore, teaching for understanding involves a change in teachers' practices: from setting educational goals in accordance with the learning needs of each student, to building work tasks in an adapted and individualized way, so as to produce learning progress for each , appreciating students' questions more than their answers, providing constructive, consistent feedback to support the production of visible learning, relevant work tasks connected to everyday life, giving them the comfort of understanding, and of finding purpose in learning, by conducting a flexible, authentic, effective assessment that supports visible learning (see Hattie, 2000).

Conclusions

Because “understanding is a strong predictor of academic achievement” (Like, Dooley, Woods, 2011), we support stimulating teachers' availability to achieve a high quality teaching act, based on the understanding process; we also plead, on the one hand, to promote a teaching built on understanding - a concept connected to the perceived curriculum seen as what the teacher understands in the school curriculum and how he performs the act of teaching starting from this reality (Jeder, 2008), and on the other hand, we support the idea of teaching to guarantee understanding in learning that will ensure the coherence, security, clarity, flexibility so necessary in facing the challenges of a world with unpredictable changes, such as the one we live in. In this context, teaching practices need to be rethought so as to support a higher level of deep, authentic, visible, effective understanding and learning.

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