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EFFICIENT DIDACTIC STRATEGIES USED IN STUDENTS' TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstract

A qualitative teaching-learning process that ensures efficiency and effectiveness involves the design and implementation of creative and innovative teaching strategies, capable of responding to the individual needs of students and ensuring their academic and, later, their social success. The present study makes a foray into the theoretical approach of teaching strategies, capturing within its definitions from the specialized literature and putting forward a personalized, complex definition of this pedagogical category. We mention that in the current pandemic context, we have had to reconsider our own teaching strategies during the Pedagogical Teaching Practice classes undertaken by the third-year students of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization. The teaching practice of the students was achieved completely online on the Microsoft Teams platform, under the guidance and supervision of the practice coordinator teacher. The current study aims to present just such an efficient teaching strategy used during the Pedagogical Teaching Practice classes, a strategy that was conceived with the aim to focus on the student's ability to reflect upon the pedagogical content discussed during the practice, their ability to explain, analyse and exemplify the content, developing a personal reflection process wherein they would be able to analyse their own learning practices as well as their teaching practices, exercising the metacognition of the students, their ability to make connections between different content, to structure and restructure the information received, and to organize and systematize the pedagogical knowledge.

1. Introduction

A qualitative academic learning-teaching process that ensures efficiency and effectiveness implies designing and using modern, creative, and innovative didactic strategies capable to satisfy the individual requirements of the students and ensure their academic and social success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Didactic strategy – definitions in the specialized literature

In a broad sense, didactic strategy refers to the manner in which actions are undertaken and improved upon, with the purpose of achieving a very well-defined goal. In the pedagogical sense, this refers to the suite of decisions that pertain to the set of decisions aimed at the good development and optimization of educational phenomena (Oprea, 2008). The strategies outline the range of practical ways to achieve the intended goal and have the value of tools (Cerghit, 2002). We have selected from the specialized literature some of the relevant definitions of didactic strategy: 'a set of forms, methods, technical means and principles of use through which the contents are presented in order to achieve certain goals' (Ionescu & Chiş, 2001); 'a group of two or more methods and procedures integrated within an operational structure, engaged at the level of the teaching-learning-assessment activity to achieve its general, specific and concrete pedagogical objectives at superior quality parameters' (Cristea, 2000).

We define modern teaching strategies as: systems of methods, procedures, means and forms of organizing educational activity integrated in a systemic vision in unitary and coherent operational structures, aimed at building learning experiences, training skills, abilities, competencies, and streamlining the instructive-educational process (Bocoş & Jucan, 2019).

The didactic strategy should not be confused or compared with an algorithm characterised by a sequence of activities or operations that must be performed in a certain order so as to obtain the correct result. 'The strategy differs from the algorithm in that it offers moments of choice in which the manifestation of an intelligent behaviour (possibly heuristic) is required' (Iucu, 2001, p. 98).

2.2. Constitutive elements of the didactic strategy within the Pedagogical Practice classes

In the current pandemic context, we had to reconsider our teaching strategies within the Pedagogical Practice classes of the third-year students specializing in the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education. The teaching practice of the students was done exclusively online, on the Microsoft Teams Platform, under the guidance of the practice coordinator teacher. Thus, the modern teaching strategies used in the online teaching took into account the following constitutive elements: the types of learning experiences of students, teaching methods and procedures, teaching aids, learning styles requested or chosen, the students' motivation for learning, the organization of instructional and educational content, configuration of learning tasks, the coordinating teacher's directing and monitoring of learning, assessment and self-assessment methods, techniques and tests designed by the teacher, the forms of organization of the planned activities, etc.

2.2.1. Modern principles in approaching teaching strategies in Pedagogical Practice

In the current context, the specific principles of approaching the curriculum of the Pedagogical Practice classes for the third-year students through modern teaching strategies have been:

- The principle of stimulating students' reflection.
- The principle of autonomy and individualization.
- The principle of contextual learning.
- The principle of collaborative learning.
- The principle of prioritizing formative, dynamic evaluation.

Thus, throughout the semester, within the online teaching activities, carried out with the third-year students within the Pedagogical Practice discipline, we had in mind the development of:

- the competencies of the students to reflect on the pedagogical contents conveyed within the practice, their capacity to explain, analyse and exemplify the pedagogical content;
- developing a process of personal reflection on their own learning practices, but also teaching practices, while developing students' metacognition;
- the ability to make connections between contents, to structure and restructure pedagogical information;
- the ability to organize and systematize pedagogical knowledge.

2.2.2. The ability to reflect upon the content

Reflection is a mental process that, applied to the act of learning knowledge, stimulates the students to use critical thinking in examining the information presented to them, to question its validity and to draw conclusions based on the resulting ideas. This ongoing process allows students to narrow down the range of possible solutions and ultimately draw a conclusion. The result of this effort is to gain a better understanding of the concepts. Without reflection, content learning becomes devoid of the reorganization of thinking imposed by in-depth learning. The individual study situations in which the students found themselves during this period in which the learning takes place require time to reflect. During pedagogical practice, students think of themselves as learning individuals, while evaluating their own thinking processes used to decide which are the best strategies to use in class with students. They will then be able to apply this information again when faced with a future learning situation, either during teaching practice or in the classroom.

2.2.3. Ability to explain, analyse and exemplify the content to be taught

The possibility to understand the knowledge base of the activities is at the intersection between the content and the pedagogical elements and consists in the student's ability to transform the information of the content into forms that are pedagogically influential, but adaptable to the variety of skills.

2.2.4. Developing a process of personal reflection on one's own teaching and learning practices / metacognition training

Reflection means reviewing, reconstructing, restoring and critically analysing personal skills, followed by synthesizing these observations in order to establish changes that can improve one's performance as a teacher. The learners, future teachers, observe their results and thus determine the causes of their success or failure. Reflection focuses on the problems they have in teaching, so that they are better able to understand their own learning behaviour and can improve their performance or help their colleagues in this regard. By promoting reflective practices at the group level, they learn to listen to others, which can make it easier for them to understand their own teaching-learning activity.

2.2.5. The ability to make connections between content, to structure and restructure information, the ability to organize and systematize knowledge

Using modern training strategies, students gain a new type of understanding of the goals of the educational process, the subject taught during the pedagogical practice classes, and pedagogical mechanisms in general.

The study framework in the online activities carried out in the Pedagogical Practice discipline is created to build the knowledge foundation, to explore new ideas, to acquire and synthesize information, to formulate and solve problem situations. Achieving them requires the creation of special learning situations, more relevant than just reading and heuristic conversation on new concepts. Thus, students learn best by studying, applying, reflecting on what they have studied, collaborating with colleagues, communicating the observations they make based on the teaching projects proposed by the practice coordinator (Muste, 2016).

A suitable framework provides numerous opportunities for research and examination of teaching projects, for trial and testing, for discussing and evaluating the learning outcomes and teaching activity.

The combination of theory and practice is best achieved when problems arise to be solved in a real context, during the ongoing activity, in the environment where the research can be put into practice.

3. Research Method

The topic proposed to the students within the online teaching activities was centred around the design of the didactic activity in the primary cycle. The modern, interactive didactic strategy proposed in the teaching of the Pedagogical Practice implies the critical analysis, together with the students, of the different models of didactic projects through the prism of the following angles:

- Making connections and subordinations between the different pedagogical concepts integrated by the didactic project, including through graphic models, schemes, figures.
- Analysing the new content, i.e., the procedural structure of each type of lesson, through characterizations, explanations, highlights of its importance from a theoretical and applied perspective.
- Asking questions about didactic design, reflection on design.
- Issuing personal opinions about the efficient ways to achieve the lesson design.
- Essentializing (summarizing) the design of each type of lesson.

Because we are in the field of cognitive constructivism we mention that we advocated for individual internal construction, for internal processes of managing, interpreting, understanding of the design activity, processes that lead to integration into cognitive schemes and structures, which in turn strengthen understanding of the design mechanism.

In the process of facilitating the understanding of design knowledge, important ideas from the content are identified, ideas that are then organized and integrated into previous cognitive structures. We have ensured that the approach to that content supports these components of the understanding process.

4. Analyses and Findings

The first step in approaching the content of didactic design in online activities is to record, together with students, important terms or phrases, terms that practically make up the skeleton of didactic design. The correct identification of these terms leads to a faster retention of the main ideas. With the help of these words, connections and subordinations are made between the different pedagogical categories.

The elaboration of the new knowledge related to the didactic design implies the use of the previous knowledge for the analysis and the understanding of the new content, but also the relation of the new knowledge with the already stored one. The organization of knowledge in this stage requires grouping the related information within structures and schemes, the schematization of the content based on the relations between the ideas, the graphic representation of the content through cognitive organizers.

Diagrams, graphs, figures provide an opportunity to present information in an abbreviated manner and are arranged on the page in such a way as to express the logical connection between ideas with the help of layout, rather than syntax. The ability of cognitive organizers to ensure structural organization for conceptual domains is their strong attribute. A diagram in a text highlights the concepts of that content and becomes a suggestive medium that directs attention in a certain way.

Using this modern strategy, the teacher-coordinator of the pedagogical practice only provides the necessary explanations, encourages research, facilitates, guides, stimulates. The coordinating practice teacher only builds upon, amplifies, and develops the cognitive constructions of the students. Their role is to create learning situations, and the student operates mentally upon them, manipulates the situations.

The proposed approach leads to the understanding of information and knowledge related to didactic design, to meanings, their internalization as representations and cognitive schemes, but also to the resolution of cognitive conflicts. This generates cognitive constructions on different types of lessons, information processing takes place, as well as the reflection process, stabilization, and clarification of controversies. The student examines the tasks, questions them, analyses them, etc. Also, this process involves the critical analysis of the material, by formulating questions with a clarifying role and by creating moments of reflection on the didactic design. Reflection is considered in studies on the functionality of metacognition as an essential activity in the performance of metacognitive activities and a fundamental quality of the performance thinker (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Leat & Lin, 2003).

The next step is to issue personal opinions on effective ways of learning, of studying the content of teaching design.

Recent studies (Blakey & Spence, 1990; Gama, 2005) prove that subjects who are aware of their own metacognitive processes are more efficient in learning. Of course, in order to understand the cognitive

process they went through in considering the content of the didactic design, the students must verbalize how they proceeded, what metacognitive strategies they used and evaluating their efficiency.

Through the proposed approach, the new content can be learned, being understood, because the student can connect the content with existing cognitive structures in a logical way, and understanding knowledge is thus a constructive activity, achieved by the student using cognitive strategies.

5. Conclusion

Our intentions have been aimed at a modern approach of teaching methodology in the current pandemic context, in university education, from the perspective of the student-centred paradigm (the structural dimension of the student-centred strategy: methods, procedures, means of training, forms of organization; the functional dimension of the student-centred strategy: flexible employment of methods, procedures, means and forms of organization and strategic choice according to skills, content, individual and group particularities).

Our goal is an in-depth study of the subject, but especially the implementation of modern teaching strategies during our activities with students, including online activities, because they develop: an active involvement in the learning and teaching process; critical thinking and observation; exploration of the environment and the discovering of personal solutions to various problems; imaginative and creative thinking capitalizing on inventiveness, fantasy, originality.

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