SKILLS-CENTERED DESIGN - A MODEL DESIGN CENTERED ON SKILLS OF TRAINING ACTIVITIES /DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILL IN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE

Sofia Loredana TUDOR, Ph.D.
University of Pitesti, Faculty of Educational Sciences
tudor_lori@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The restructuring of the educational curriculum at primary level is marked in particular by the reconfiguration of educational outcomes through introducing general skills curricular variables. The aim of this study is to analyze concepts system on skills-centered design by translating the results of actual analyzes conducted on skills-based curriculum encountered in literature. The study design proposes to develop a skills–centred design model of training activities/ development of communicative skill in integrated perspective in primary schooll. In defining the model is taken into account the cross-cutting approachof the communicative skill in primary school by specifying its development modaliy through the study of historical content. The study conclusions highlight the dynamic procedural character of the skills – centered design, involving various stages and recovered in a systemic manner, and also the importance of correlating the curricular design for teaching activity of general skills of an curriculum area with transversal skills.*

Keywords: *skill, skill-centered teaching, skill-based curriculum model, curriculum design centered on skills, communicative skill*

1. Theoretical Background

European introduction of the eight key skills and implicitly, the educational curriculum restructure at primary level by redefining educational outcomes and the introduction of the general and specific skills, led to the development in the Romanian educational system of the educational policy focused on skills training. **The training based on skills** has as premise the focus of the teaching on the finalities and on student, assuming the shift in emphasis from the transmission of content to skills training by identifying the learning basic elements and the elements which ensure the student's academic

progress; also involves designing and building customized training routes individualized learning.

Over the time, international educational policies have been marked by the evolution (Niculescu, 2005): from the *content centered curriculum* (Bestor, A., 1956; Phenix, P., 1962; Oliva, P., 1977; Hutchins, R., 1980), *curriculum as learning experience* (Bobitt, F., 1918; Taba, H., 1962; Dewey, J., 1938; Tanner, D., 1995), *objectives centered curriculum* (Bloom, B. 1956; Tyler, R., 1949; Burke, B., 2009, Marzano, R., 2010), *curriculum as a trening plan* (Valerien, J., 1991; Goodlad, J., 1998), *to the curriculum as non-technical approach* (Einser, E., 1994; Apple, W., 2001; Greene, M.. 2008; Gilligan, C., 2010; Pinar, W., 2012).

The aplication in teaching trening of the **skills-based curricular model** it is prospective in relation to current social and professional demands not only in the Romanian education system, involving students in lifelong learning and self-assessment of their skills and facilitating exploitation of the whole educational experience in curriculum development. The curriculum focused on skills has a constructivist approach, facing professional practice. The teacher's role is to guide learning, responsible for creating learning situations focusing on basic skills training and the development of transversal skills (Kouwenhoven, 2010).

The skills-based curricular design it's a highly promoted dimension in Romanian pedagogical literature underlying current teaching design changes at the operational level of its realization (curriculum area level design, design of teaching activity). In practice design at these levels, it will be taken into account the complementarity of three approaches: **design centered on results** (Burns, R.; Squires, D., 1987; Seels, B., 1990; Ramsden, P., 1992; Brown, A.S, 1998; Killen, R., 1998 in Niculescu, 2005) – within which prevails the results /targets that students must achieve and which are defined in the practice of teaching design as *operational objectives;* ***standards centered design*** (Sahlberg, 2010) – defined by standards that the student must achieve at a discipline level/ curriculum area, known as performance indicators or curricular performance standards or performance descriptors; **process centred design** (Knight, P.T, 2001; Hussey, T. şi Smith, P., 2003; Maher, A., 2004 in Niculescu, 2005) – which analyzes the student's learning specific to train skills. In this regard, the didactic design for curricular area level involves some sequential stages formed in a chain unit for training/ development of skills: determining educational outcomes formulated in terms of pedagogic skills (by their identifying in educational programs), identifying the sub-competences (Meyer, 2000), namely their structural components -

knowledge, skills, pedagogical attitudes (through the analysis and derivation of specific skills components presented in curricula), establishing sub-competences descriptors,namely the level of performance that is accepted in the assessment of competence (by the operationalization of the competence)and which are targeted results in the design of teaching (Landsheere, Landsheere, 1979; Mager, 1984; Potolea, Toma, 2010)

From this perspective, skills-based design is a way of showing actual interactions and interdependencies between provided skills, teaching contents,teaching-learning principles and strategies, assessment principles and strategy in formal context (Singer, Ciolan, 2008; Bocoş, 2007).

Defining **the skill** was and remains a problematic approach, conceptual boundaries identified in pedagogical literature are not only different, but also contradictory. In the restricted sense, the skill is the ability of a person to select, combine and appropriate use knowledge, abilities and other acquisitions consisting of values and attitudes for successful resolution of certain categories of learning situations and personal or professional development or in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Dictionnaire de la Psychologie – PUF, Paris, 1995, p.162; Rosencrantz, H.A., Biddler, B. J. 1964, în Marcus, S., 1999; Potolea, Toma, 2010). In cognitive vision, a skill involves simultaneously three dimensions juxtaposed which merge into a whole that ensures performance: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and attitudes (Mitrofan, N., 1988; Salade, D., 1990; Gherghinescu, R., 1999).

From skills design perspective, we consider appropriate, at least in relation with the development of educational paradigms, the constructivist interpretations of the skill (Eraut, 1995; Dall'Alba şi Sandberg, 1996; Stoof et al, 2002; Sandberg şi Pinnington, 2009, apud. Ripamoti, S., Scaratti, G., 2011 in Jinga, I., Istrate, E., 1998) which have in regard its qualitative manifestation directly influenced and dependent of the context and contextualized subjective experiences that individuals live.

From the perspective of educational approach, stands out the predominant transdisciplinary character of **the skil** and the close relation between skills and educational content. The curriculum design approach to the operational level, namely the development of learning situations is carried out following the training and development of students skills through coherent integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes and their proper relationship with cognitive , acting and attitudinal contents transmitted through the curricular areas/ disciplines of education contents.

The design based on skills focuses on the active role of students to select alone, or guided, according to their own interests and needs, different topics/ contents, and deepen certain contents or to recover any difficulties encountered in learning.It is carried aut the premises of developing an educational trail accessible to all students, respecting individual characteristics, age, cognitive and affective-emotional characteristics. The realization of skills-based design has the role to facilitate students' independent and effective learning, developing critical - reflective thinking, their organizational skills to their learning and problem solving.

In the current undergraduate curriculum,the curricula for primary school (OM 3371/ 2013, OM 5003/ 2014) has a new structure which allows the introduction into one of the three programs - preparatory class, I-st grade and II-nd grade respectively the III-rd and IV-th grade, for a better viewing and tracking of the continuity and the progress on the skills and teaching contents level. They provide the skill as an structured system of educational finalities for primary school curricula. Their critical analysis of evolutionary level and on complexity increase of the content level in relation to the tracked skills allows the known of the academic progressof the student on a curricular cycle, from the cycle of fundamental acquisitions (preparatory, I-st grade, and II-nd grade) to the development cycle (II-rd grade, Iv-th grade, and so on the V-th and VI-th grade).

The design at the curriculum area /teaching activity level will consider the specific of the skill and the staggered definition of it to the operationalization level.

The components of communicative skill in mother language, as the reference framework for key competences for lifelong learning or the levels established in the literature reference framework are elaborated in accordance with the eight key skills, in the idea of developing a single framework in the students acquisition progression regardless of the language they speak (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Portfolio_EN.asp.)

Approached in terms of targeted results, the comunication in mother language skill reflects the student's ability to express and interpret concepts, beliefs, feelings and opinions, both orally and in writing; the availability to interact with others in an appropriate and creative way; efficient and proper use of codes, of languages and conventions of terminology belonging to different fields of knowledge; verbal and nonverbal messages used to receive and transmit ideas, experiences and feelings; adapting the communication to different social and cultural contexts (Recommendation of the European

Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning, (2006/962/EC)

Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence presented in the same document are: individual's cognitive ability to interpret the world and relate to others (knowledge of vocabulary, functional grammar and the functions of language); an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts, the main features of different styles and registers of language, and the variability of language and communication in different contexts (skills to communicate both orally and in writing in a variety of communicative); the abilities to distinguish and use different types of texts, to search for, collect and process information, to use aids, and to formulate and express one's oral and written arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context; a positive attitude towards communication in the mother tongue (disposition to critical and constructive dialogue, an appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them, interest in interaction with others).

2. Design of Research

2.1. The premises of the research

Analyzed at the educational design level, **the comunication in the mother language skill /** Romanian is composed of a a number of factors relating to the use of language as a tool for oral and written communication; the representation, interpretation and tunderstanding of the reality using language as a tool; perception and sharing knowledge; the organization and orientation of or the shaping of thinking and behavior (OM 3371/ 2013, OM 5003/ 2014)

From the analysis of the primary curriculum documents,we identify relevant issues on the curricula for the new school programs. The establishment of the general skills for the Communication in Romanian language field envisages the communicative-functional model, focusing on communication as a complex field that includes processes and perceive written andoral messages and the oral and written expression. Students must learn to communicate in specific contexts for the learning to produce his effect in other similar situations, real or simulated. This explains the introduction in the curriculum of some functional elements such as writing the ticket, invitation, letter and diary made with text and drawings and within the themes or projects available to small pupil, transcripts - necessary for reading and writing skills training, the imaginative writing starting from the

lived experience (texts of 3-5 sentences I-st grade), greeting card, poster, book, newspaper or classroom magazine, elements of communication building, words that have the same shape but different meaning II-nd grade).

Comparing them to the curicula of school programs for preparatory –IV-th grades, the components of the communicative skill identified in the study program curricula, so in all curricular areas are:

- Knowledge of new terms, the specific language assimilation
- Understanding the specific language of a science,of the messages transmitted oral/ written
- Arguing some situations/ facts by issuing different opinions, ways of solving etc.
- Expressing a decision, solutions, benefits/ limitations of a situation
- Solving problems by using specific terminology, wording appropriate assumptions, camunicating the situation, the issue of generalizations etc.
- Critical assessment by arguing his own opinions, making judgments, communication of ideas, development of customized texts about the given situation

2.2. The Purpose of study

The purpose of research is to develop a skill-centered model design of training activities/ development of communicative skill in integrated perspective/ transdisciplinary in primary education (II-nd- IV-th grade).

2.3. The Methodology of Research

The experimental research has been effected during a school year, at primary school level, including 131 subjects – pupils from the IV-th grade. Thus: 27,2% boys and 72,8% girls; 55% from the urban background, 45% from the rural one.

The asses and the evaluation of communication skill from a transdisciplinary perspective was performed in the curricular areas *Language and Comunication* (IV-th grades) and *Man and Society* (IV-th grade). For this experiment was organized an psiho-pedagogical experiment conducted over a period of 8 months, being used docimology evaluation tests, case study, pshiho-pedagogical observation.

I opted for the discipline Romanian language and literature because over the three years are studied texts with historical content. The following texts are studied: *Condeiele lui Vodă, Stajarul din Borzești* (II-nd grade), *Ocaua*

lui Cuza, După steag, băieți, Moș Ion Roată și Vodă Cuza (III-th grades), *Carol I, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Unirea Principatelor Române, Ştefan cel Mare, Ecaterina Teodorescu* (IV-th grades).

I chose the discipline of History, because the curriculum involves the analysis of historical content. The communication skill in history curricula in primary school is reflected through the efficient utilization of the communication and the specialized language.

The evaluation of results and academic progress of students is realised based on curricular competencies and curricular standards set for the end of the primary cycle. Three of curricular standards of achievement in the discipline of history education aims to develop communicative competence, as follows: S2 - Identify information from a given historical source, S3 – Relating an studied historical event, using terms, S4 - Presenting an historically fact based on a simple plan of ideas.

The measurement of the communicative skill targeted: identifying data based on texts of events, personalities, aspects of everyday life in different times of history (will be measured the ability to detach the meaning/ message of a text), presentation and argumentation information from Romanian history (will be measured the ability to interpret/ argue), presenting an event spent in the family some time before (will be measured the ability to tell/ report).

2.4. The Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Designing teaching activities in terms of focusing on skills provides the design of the following elements of educational approach:

- designing teaching strategies and ways of learning in relation with the oprational objectives / delimited competence units
- design methods, teaching methods and forms of organization used to support student - student, student - content interactivity;
- design methods and assessing tools for communication skill

For the training /development of students' ability to detach meaning /message of an historical text, at the lessons of history (Alexandru Ioan Cuza, IV-th grade) is projected conversation strategies (based on conversation, explanation, debate) in combination with multimedia strategy, in which the teacher uses multimedia resources (interactive game, PowerPoint slides, films with historical content, audio and video). The approach is heuristic learning, asking the students to solve complex tasks, search and information discovery.

For training /development of students' ability to argue historical events, the lessons of history (Carol I, IV-th grade) are combined the multimedia strategies with the interactive group ones. At the time of attention capture, uses the interplay of educational software that is accessed individual by students and groups worksheet. The informations presented in the game from the software are factual data, and the answers are completed by thinking tasks based on the texts of the worksheet. As a source of information are presented PowerPoint slides containing texts depicting historical and representative images (historic figures, battles sequences, illustration of documents). The students work in groups, being involved one at a time in solving tasks , support each other and complement each other, by generalizations and associations of ideas. In this way, it is provided a double interactivity: with the informational content, which raises to searches, ideas association, generalizations and an interactivity between students, between which occurs cooperation for the development of the correct answer.

For training /development of students' ability to tell /report, to the lessons of history (Union of the Romanian Principalities, IV-th grade) are used as teaching aids educational software, audio and videorecords, historical content films and also traditional aids as textbook and worksheets for students. It is presented successively during the activity sequences with historical content recorded from a TV show to lead students to discover new information, which are supplemented by information from texts in the manual. It works in groups, students search, select information, compare and synthesize, the multimedia strategies beeing information sources which exploit the volume of students information, promotes and favors the development of pupils ability to relate /narrate events.

On the base of an film with historical content (with transmitting information role) the students solve based on group work collaboratively complex tasks: characterization of Carol I, describing the Battle of Smârdan, identifying moral qualities of Carol I. Also relevant are the effects that presenting a black and white recording testimonies of old people had on students making them sensitive and thereby creating a strong emotional climate to assimilate the informations. Using multimedia strategies is relevant in this case in terms of the emotionally – motivational effect. The teacher designs an inductive learning approach, asking students solving thinking tasks and interdisciplinary correlations, the clarification of some expressions occurring in the characters testimony (people wore on holidays the drift clothes), create descriptions (description of the folk costumes), make comparisons between folk costumes.

The design of learning organization approaches is considering the formative informative valueof the strategic combinations. Multimedia strategies are used to transmit new information, awakening the students interest to discover knowledge, determination of emotional experiences by their contact with the voice and image of characters that belong to the past. The design strategies based on conversation (conversation, explanation, debate) favors the solving of complex tasks which require thinking operations (characterization, description, identification of qualities, search and discovery of information, association of ideas, synthesis and generalizations, argument some phenomenas, actions). The interactive strategies come to "supplement", through group work, students' „work" the discovered informations, make associations, comparisons, descriptions, classifications of data, ordering them on the basis of some criteria, synthesis, generalizations (complex thinking tasks). Learning activity is supported by discussions, group debates which favors the development of essential ideas, conclusions, clarifying certain concepts, phrases, ideas, their interpretation, by finding alternatives, pros and cons etc.

The results due to the teaching organization of the lessons of history presented respecting the elements of the skill-centered design model highlights significant increases in average skills in each of the skills measured.

Group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Experimental group	to tell the story _pretest	131	1,00	4,00	2,7061
	identify message _pretest	131	1,00	4,00	2,3740
	argues _pretest	131	1,00	2,00	1,3874
	Total score_pretest	131	3,00	10,00	6,4523

Table. 1 scores obtained for each indicator in the pretest stage

Group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Experimental group	To tell the story_posttest	131	1,25	4,00	2,9160
	Identify message_posttest	131	2,00	4,00	3,3378
	argues_posttest	131	1,00	2,00	1,6622
	Total score_posttest	131	5,25	10,00	7,9065

Table. 2 scores obtained for each indicator in the posttest stage

Design and implementation of educational activities in the set manner is supported by model efficiency in terms of the measured sub-skills. There is an increasing ability *to identify a text message*, with significant differences

between pre- and posttest, which means progress of subjects in the experimental group (the significant difference value is huge t = -9.8). As regards the ability to *argumentation /interpretation* and ability *to relate /narrate* a text using specialized language the progress is relatively small, but obvious to the coordinates of this experiment

3. Conclusions and discussion

In the development of a possible skills-centered design model that can be addressed at primary level was considered the theoretical model of building and achieving transversal skills (proposed by Ion Negret Dobridor in the volume The design of skills-centered curriculum). According to him, the most important element of the system of key-skills, and also the general and specific skills presented in school curricula *is the possibility for them to be formed in time*, along schooling the student. Level I) I-st – Iv-th grade) for skills training it is defined by:

(a) Knowledge (perception of specific elements, elements of historical space/folk /geographical etc., characteristics of the local community/historical etc. direct data observation, knowledge of specific poems and songs appropriate to their age etc.)

(b) skills (skills, abilities) (description and location of events, explaining the succession of recent historical events, individual artistic expression: drawing, songs, poems, watching some historical elements: performances, images, activities)

(c) Attitudes (respect for the heritage elements previously existing individual experience initiative in the field of artistic expression)

Developing a possible model for skills-centered design of the activity focused on skills training /development of communicative skill in primary school in terms of training communicative skill by teaching /learning historical content is defined by the following elements

- the formulation of sub-skills, by pedagogical derivation of the curricular area general skills;
- the operational formulation of sub-skills descriptors in terms of observable and measurable behaviors based on historical text;
- determining the types of curriculum content directly related to internal components of sub-skills /skills and ways of combining them;
- designing their own learning approach and optimal strategic combinations, that are centered on the active learning, experiential learning, inter- learning:

Designing a heuristic learning approach is supported by optimal combination between traditional strategies (based on conversation, explanation, debate), multimedia strategies (based on interactive game, PowerPoint slides, films with historical content, audio and video records)

Designing an inductive learning approach is supported by optimal combination between multimedia strategy (based on interactive game, PowerPoint slides, films with historical content, audio and video) with interactive strategies (cooperation/ collaboration/ competition group)

The design of an formative assessment approach, enabling continuous evaluation of the skill during activity and summative through the construction and application of some evaluation items for the subunits of the skill. Each specific competence can be assessed by different types of items, and even by different assessment tools. The assesment action starting from the skills asses is an effective way to determine whether students skills have passed from theoretical plan, of the specialized language knowledge, to the implementation plan, of the transversal skills development, extrapolation of communication in various contexts.

References

Bocoș, M. (2007). *Didactica disciplinelor pedagogice. Un cadru constructivist*. Cluj- Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Ciolan, L. (2008). *Învăţarea integrată – fundamente pentru un curriculum transdisciplinar*. Iaşi: Polirom.

Gherghinescu, R. (1999). *Conceptul de competenţă didactică*. In Marcus, S. and other (1999). *Competenţa didactică - perspectivă psihologică.* Bucureşti: All Pedagogic.

Jinga, I.; Istrate, E. (1998). *Manual de pedagogie*. Bucureşti: All Pedagogic.

Kouwenhoven, W. (2010). *Competence-based curriculum development in higher education: some African experiences*. In Cantrell, M.; Kool, M.; Kouwenhoven, W. (Eds.) (2010). *Access & Expansion: Challenges for Higher Education Improvement in Developing Countries*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.

Landsheere, V.; Landsheere,G. (1979). *Definirea obiectivelor educaţiei.* Bucureşti: EDP.

Mager, R. F. (1984). *Preparing Instructional Objectives*. Belmont, USA: Lake Publishing Company.

Marcus, S. and other (1999). *Competenţa didactică - perspectivă psihologică.* Bucureşti: All Pedagogic.

Meyer, G. (2000). *De ce şi cum evaluăm*. Iaşi: Polirom.

Mitrofan, N. (1988). *Aptitudinea pedagogică.* Bucureşti: Academiei RSR.

Negreţ – Dobridor, I. (coord.) (2012). *Proiectarea curriculum-ului centrat pe competenţe.* POSDRU/87/1.3/S/61602. "Cariera de suces în învăţământul preuniversitar prin implementarea de programe de formare inovative!".

Niculescu, R. (2005). *Teoria şi managementul curriculumului. Braşov:* Universităţii Transilvania.

Potolea, D; Toma, S. (2010), *„Competenţa: concept şi implicaţii pentru programele de formare a adulţilor*, a III-a Conferinţă naţională de educaţie a adulţilor, Timişoara.

Salade, D. (1997). *Receptarea noului în practica şcolară*. In *Dezbateri de didactică aplicată.* Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Sahlberg, P. (2010). *Models of curriculum development – internation trands and the way Worward. I*n Sahlberg, P (ed.), *Curriculum reform and implementation in the 21st century: policies, perspectives and impelentaton*. Procedings of the Internation Conference on Curriculum Reform and Implementation. Ankara, Turkey.

Singer, M.; Sarivan, L. (2006). *Quo Vadis, Academia? Repere pentru o reformă de profunzime în învăţământul superior*. Bucureşti: Sigma.

*** Dictionnaire de la Psychologie. (1995). Paris: PUF.

***OM 3371/ 2013, http://lege5.ro/MonitorOficial/monge2dembygu/monitorul-oficial-partea-i-nr-192-05-04-2013.4

OM 5003/ 2014, http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/22407.

*** *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006).* 18 Dec. 2006, 2006/962/EC. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962).

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Portfolio_EN.asp.