

PUTTING THEORY INTO METAPHORS – A WAY TO FREELY EXPRESS AND ARGUE THORNY THEORETICAL ISSUES

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Abstract: *The paper presents several reflections about the methodology of teaching in the domain of Sciences of Education, particularly in Curriculum Theory field. The role and the importance of metaphor as teaching method are shortly presented. The metaphor of the tree and the metaphor of the four essential elements in nature are presented in correlation with the five structural elements of a learning situation. At the final of the paper a pleading for the re-consideration of the specialized professional in sciences of education as a peculiar case of a professional of education is presented. This pleading is based on the recognition of the huge role of the education for society.*

Key words: *curriculum, metaphor, professional of education*

1. Two metaphors expressing the structure of a learning situation as core aspect of curriculum

More than twenty years of methodological research, while teaching the theory within the sciences of education fields showed, with significant results, that metaphor is a way of an in depth analyze and understanding for the most difficult concepts.

Metaphor in didactical field involves important cognitive approaches. It was used in teaching and assessing areas, as well. It starts with the engagement of imagination to find something to be put in analogy with the considered theoretical issue. Then, a detailed analysis process of both sides of analogy is done. Connections among each structural element are found and arguments are produced. There not exist wrong metaphors. Only the analogies can be wrong or wrongly conducted and presented. A SWOT

analysis of the expression of a theoretical issue by using metaphor is necessary in the end, in order to avoid the forced reasoning that can disturb the correct understanding of the theoretical aspects. The benefits in the formative plan have been revealed by a long term research with partially published results along the years.

1.1. The metaphor of the tree

The metaphor of the tree has been chosen by a group of students in order to express the structure and the functionality of a learning situation.

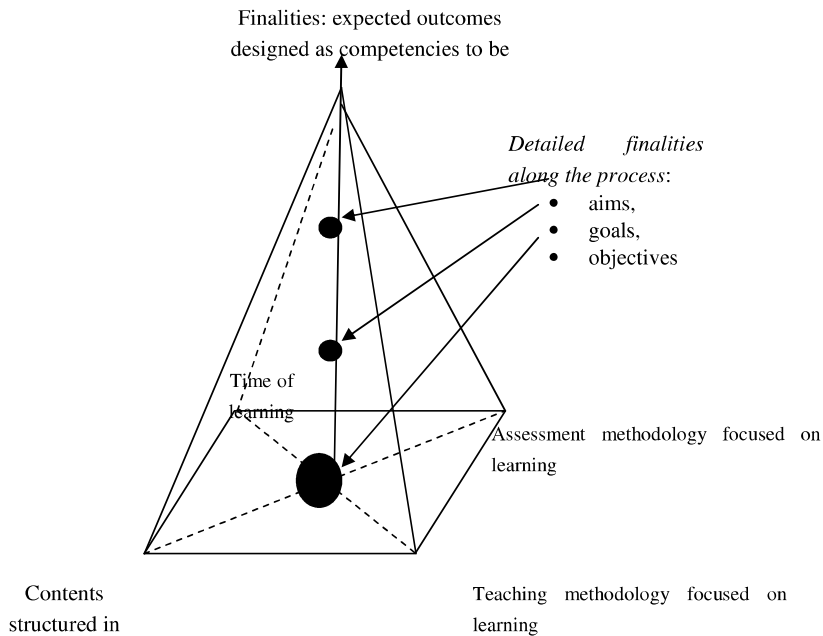


Fig. 1 Pyramidal structure of curriculum

The real results of the tree mission have been considered as being the fruit of the tree, while the expected outcomes have been put in analogy with the buds of the tree. Both of them can vary according to the type of the tree and the specific geographical conditions. Thus, the level of designing these results was considered as being expressed by the buds of the tree that contain all the core characteristics of the final fruit. They appear in spring time, a

season imagined and argued as a strategic level. The final results (students' competencies) are represented by the fruit in autumn, the moment of the final evaluation inside an educational cycle. Even if fruit belong to the same variety of tree they can reveal different qualitative standards, depending on all what it is happening along the year (the four seasons as the expression of the *time* in pyramidal structure). Nature provides different varieties of fruit as education provide different types of competencies with specified qualitative levels, each having its own importance and utility.

The summer time represents the body of the educational process, the specific time of growth, with continuing assessments of each level of development, involving necessary corrections accompanying the care process (analogy with the didactic/ educational process).

Autumn is not only the time of collecting fruit but also the moment of seeds' quality evaluation. They are *the essence* of the progress, as the transversal and flexible specific competencies are the sign of an optimal adaptability of human being for change and progress.

The winter time was considered as the time of individual learning, of reflection as a resource for a new spring, a new season of life seen as a new cycle of learning.

But for this entire dynamic, the contents are necessary. The contents are designed to answer to the question WHAT is to be learnt? The analogy, shown by students, of contents in the life of a tree was the sap that circulates through the roots, trunk, branches and leaves and nourish the buds, flowers and fruits in their growth. This sap is extracted by roots from the ground as the contents of curriculum are extracted from the culture, technology, sciences, and art. The selection of minerals in nature and of contents in education is done according to the specific necessity of each age of the tree/ learner, of each level of the growing/ education moment, and of each need for fruit and for educated people within different (socio-economical and professional) contexts with peculiar needs.

In nature it is not so important what kind of fruit is obtained. All varieties are necessary. But their quality is to be considered and the potential of fruit's seeds is essential. Fruit quality largely depends on the process of development of the fruit, strongly determined both by the individual data of the plant, and the growing conditions.

In education it should not be important only to obtain a diploma or a certificate, as documents. This has a formal determination, depending on the path and the field of specialization. Essential is here the cover of these final documents with real competencies as distinctive sign of power and capability of individuals and groups aiming the progress of society as a whole. The quality of education depends largely on the quality of all stakeholders: teachers with their professional competence, all other educators who

influence implicitly and explicitly the evolution of learners (parents, other professionals who are tangential involved in education). The latter is absolutely necessary to recognize their limits in terms of expertise in education, unless they have specific training in the field.

The students have highlighted some other conditions that determine the quality of fruits and, analogically, the quality of the educational approach.

First should be stressed the role of the leaves, that facilitate the relation between what the ground gives for the tree and the context conditions (sun, atmosphere and the water). They have been put into analogy with the methodology of teaching that connects the contents with the didactic means, within the climate of the partnership between teacher and students. The wide context of life for a tree and for school life is also a subject of analogy. Expected outcomes in education depend on the natural environment, socio-cultural context of education and the development of the relationship between students' innate data however. Similarly the quality of fruit depends on the natural environment and the level of previous development of each tree along their own evolution. Also, for the human being is important what it was obtained through education in earlier stages, especially when it is about the attitudinal plan. All these are conducive for the competence standards determining a specific balance between the designed expected outcomes and the real results (ideal and real curriculum).

Natural conditions, the weather specificity throughout the year, gardeners' craftsmanship are the real determinants of fruit quality. The actual conditions of implementation of the curriculum, educators' mastery and the degree of their motivation are key factors for quality of competencies acquired by students and, eventually even for the students' motivation for their own development.

As it was already suggested, the seeds (metaphorically speaking) encapsulate both when it is about fruit, and about the acquired students' competencies, a new future, a new sequence of life for trees and people alike.

Winter maintains and cares for seed, as the society should take care of everything that is human's germs future.

An interesting analogy and distinction has been done with our students about the relation among learning situation- learning opportunity and learning experiences.

Distinguishing learning situation learning opportunity is suggested by the difference between the fruit trees grown in households and those raised in specialized orchard for production, where they are knowingly and willingly cared for obtaining a high quality of fruit. This analogy is specific to formal education.

The idea of the mentioned relationship in non-formal education context is suggested by the trees growing along the road. They could be planted willingly and could benefit by an early care, but the care process does not take on the dimensions of an orchards.

In the forests - where planting or care is not always caused willfully, in the same way as in informal education, the learning situation can be accidentally turned into learning opportunity. Transformation depends on the degree in which formal education has created positive attitudes towards the act of learning itself. Similarly, the care for the trees in forests depends on the degree of awareness about the importance of the forest; this is obtained by formal and non-formal education by the people who benefit.

1.2. The metaphor water, air, fire, ground

The metaphor *water, air, fire, ground* may be considered as a synthetic view about the structural elements of the learning situation. The next table presents the involved analogies and a short argue for each of them.

Nature	Learning situation/ curriculum	Explanation
The Man/ human being who uses the <i>water, air, fire, ground.</i>	Educational outcomes designed and obtained as humans' competencies	Man uses Air, Water, Fire, and Ground for his own life and for the future of his fellows. The future of humanity depends on how each human being knows how to use and appreciate these gifts
Air	Time of learning	Air, as the time, is vital. Air pollution and wasted time are resources that cannot be recovered. Both caring about purity and protection of the atmosphere and the management of the human being time are issues involving intelligence and mastery.
Ground	Contents	The Ground and implicitly the Earth have many riches. A careful selection of these riches should be done according to various moments of life development and for each subject of this development. The beneficiary of this richness should be able to pay back to the ground and Earth. That's because the earth's

		riches should not decrease but on the contrary. Likewise, human culture and civilization have values and unsuspected treasures. But education must carefully select curriculum contents. They must make possible the development both of the learner and of the culture and civilization themselves. The educated people should be able to develop the Culture and Civilization of Humanity.
Water	Teaching methodology focused on learning	Water is the sculptor of genius in nature. Teaching methods in education should carefully carve the rock to release the Sphinx of it. The treasure of the human potential must be released. The methods should be as vivid as water. They should sprightly or smoothly run, as the water does, appropriately to the passing landscape. The methods must be adapted to each personality, to help it flourish.
Fire	Evaluation (assessment) methodology focused on learning	Fire should not be primarily because it burns. The fire should be particularly revealing as a source of glare and light. The evaluation process should not be considered important only because it gives verdicts and measured rank. Thus, the assessment should not be primarily judgment, but a starting point for self-reflection and self-development.

2. Education and professionals of education – landmarks and treasures of mankind's future

Everywhere in the world, theoretically, education is a priority. But it seems to be interesting that at the same time, the professionals of education are not put on the right place on the socio-professional hierarchy. This situation is quasi-unanimous, even the degree of consideration for educators as professionals is dispersed over a very wide scale. An in depth analysis of this situation should be a priority and a special concern *for the educators themselves. The respect needs firstly self respect.* The power of education is inside the educational system, inside of the human resources of this system (educators and learners alike).

The educational system involves professionals with different degrees of training for the specific field of education. Most of human resources are specialists in different cultural, technological or scientific fields with a short training for teaching profession. There are specialists in education itself, in curriculum theory, assessment, educational counseling, educational management, adults' training etc. There is a specialized language within the sciences of education field.

Using the same instrument of metaphor one can say that since the human exists on the Earth the process of birth has existed, not assisted by someone specialized at the beginning. But no one denies nowadays the specialized role of a gynecologist, instead the importance of a specialist in curriculum or, generally speaking in sciences of education is obviously neglected.

The problem is that professionals of education do not anything to fight against this cliché. An external solution appears to be expected. And it will never come.

This final of paper is a serious invitation for reflection addressed to all the professionals in Sciences of Education which should be more assertive when it is about of using the correct specialty language in different contexts, especially in projects (national and international projects as well), when it is about the accuracy of their professional domain.

And first of all, a core unity of views is also necessary in the field of sciences of education itself. The professional conferences, focused on this issues, should be more interesting and effective than the conferences done only for increasing the number of points of the individuals' portfolios, or the assessment points of an institutional structure.

I have the strong belief that the reform and the change should be found in ourselves, in our mutual trust and in the trust about our role and power.

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