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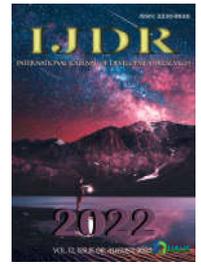
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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AFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE HUMANIZATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES

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ABSTRACT

The students welcoming and the establishment of respectful relationships is one of the understandings of humanization in a teaching and learning process. These relationships are established through communication between the people involved in a course. Thus, communication is a fundamental pillar of the process for humanization in an educational situation. In collaborative online distance courses, it is the choice of the pedagogical strategies that value interaction that gives the opportunity for affection in communication, aligned with the proposal of collaborative activities, to provide significant experiences to the students. Although facilitation via audio and video has been gaining prominence in the past few years, a lot of the interactions in online remote learning still happen through writing. However, even though written and verbal communication seems quite natural and familiar, both require a high degree of attention, as words are responsible for conveying emotion, affection and confidence and the use of a wrong word or a poorly elaborated phrase can generate potential misunderstandings among those involved. This article presents reflections on affective communication in online distance learning courses, and on the way it enables humanization in relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

The warm welcoming of students and the establishment of respectful human and co-participative relationships is a part of the understanding of humanization in a teaching and learning process. Those relationships are established through communication (verbal, written, non-verbal) between the people involved in a course and, therefore, its absence leads to a void in the establishment of relationships. Consequently, communication is a fundamental pillar of the process for us, and a great responsibility for humanization in an educational environment, regardless of the modality of learning (in person, hybrid, or distant learning). The physical distance between professor and students, which is characteristic of distance education, expects the use of some sort of technology so that the relationship with the material, with the professor, and between students may happen. These resources are, in general, available in a Learning Management System (LMS), since those environments allow the integration of multiple types of media, communication methods, and resources. They also offer possibilities for the creation of unique educational settings which value student's participation in a contextualized way, and integrated with the learning goals (KENSKI, 2007). However, the evolution dynamism of technology constantly presents new resources, and that allows for e-courses to be offered outside of a LMS, still with intensive use of communication

resources. We can list as examples courses offered through the apps WhatsApp and Telegram, among others. In distance education courses, the welcoming and the establishing of relationships - characteristics of humanization in an educational process, happen by the means of using technological communication resources combined with pedagogical strategies valuing interaction. And here we call attention to the word "means," as such should be the role of technology in distance learning: the support by which means teaching and learning happen. It is by the means of technology that the content is researched, debates are established, students' questions are answered, either synchronously or asynchronously. By the means of technology, students form groups, discuss the activities, and create bonds. Also through that, the contact is established between students and staff -institution's coordinators or administrative and financial assistants. That says that technology is the means by which almost everything is done on distance education courses, but it is not the end. It is the means for communication (in its diverse modalities) to be established (or not) in a course, according to the pedagogy proposal adopted and, consequently, technology can be the humanizing element of those courses. From those considerations, and from the authors concerns with the level of interactions at distance learning courses to which they are connected, this article aims to present reflections on the affective communication in online remote courses, and on how it supports humanized relationships. Such reflections are a result of the data collected in previous years by a research titled "Technological Resources in Distance Education as Facilitators of the

Construction of Knowledge: An analysis of students' perception," which is being developed at a University Center in the city of São Paulo. The reflections here presented will also foster the continuity of the research mentioned which, in this new phase, will log students' perceptions on affective communication.

Affective communication as an element of humanization in distance education: Communication between students and educators is considered the base of relationships in the teaching and learning process by several authors (PERRENOUD, 1995; FREIRE, 1977; HOLMBERG, 1988; among others). Responsibilities are mutual in that relationship: educators must have communication skills in order to use it in a pedagogical way (CLEMENTINO, 2008), and students must overcome the barrier of passiveness to explain their doubts, to make comments, observations, and inquiries, as well as to join debates.

For Clementino,

understanding education as "*a diverse situation and one in motion, according to individuals, places, and the contexts where it happens*" (PIMENTA, 2005, p. 48, author's italics), finds in distance education, perhaps more than in any other educational/learning situation, its most amplified meaning, once different types of courses can be offered in different ways, to different audiences, and in different contexts. Online remote learning, therefore, is a situation in motion and diverse by nature. (2007, p. 03)

In a large portion of distance education courses and also now, during the coronavirus pandemic when the Emergency Remote Education (ERE)¹ has been adopted, technology has been intensively utilized in methods of communication and people's interaction. Depending on the pedagogical strategy adopted and, consequently, on the way the curriculum and activities are developed, the perception of the distance between people can decrease or increase. That distance perception is the psychological and communicative space called transactional distance by Moore (1983). Conti and Martini (2015) highlight that when technological resources are noticed and utilized as a way to promote reflective and creative activities, with space for communication and exchange, new constructions happen, opening up the field of experiences. Thereby, interactional and social learning happen through a virtual world. Interactions and relationships are highlighted by Vergara (2007), based upon pedagogy and biology - with Maturana and Varela (2005) as references; as important sources for the individual and societal constructions. The author highlights that building relationships involves both, a rational and an emotional aspect, the latter connected to affection, and that the attributes of loyalty, commitment, and mutual trust are fundamental to strengthen relationships and, therefore, to humanize them. That should be considered when directing actions in distance education in the pedagogical realm, as well as in the administrative one, when contact with students happens. Vergara (2007) states that in the pedagogical realm one should reply to students promptly and affectionately, and at the same time provoke them and guide them towards a constant collective growth. In order for that to happen, it is necessary to propose activities that promote reflection and discussion, allowing space for integration so students can feel there is a relationship between them and their professor, just as one between them and their classmates. The author also highlights the need for coherence and consistent actions and communications by the professionals involved

¹ As for Patricia Alejandra Behar (2020), a professor at the College of Education and of the graduate programs in education and in education computing at UFRGS, remote learning means that educators and students are geographically distant from one another, prohibited by a decree to walk into the education institutions, in order to avoid the dissemination of the coronavirus. And that is an emergency since, without previous warning, the initial planning had to be adapted to the new reality and, with no time for a new planning to be made or for educators to be trained, they needed to think of pedagogical activities mediated by technology, utilizing the internet. However, most educational institutions had not developed their curriculum for remote classes.

in mediating the process, whether professors, tutors, mentors, or coordinators. That way, students will notice the institution's organization, and the unity and cohesiveness of the course's staff.

Supporting that train of thought, in research made with students of a remote course, it was stated that

the interaction established between participants was one of their motivational factors. And inside such an interacting process, they (students) also highlighted the feedback and the individualized treatment by their tutor as the specifics that humanized the course's teaching/learning process. (CLEMENTINO, 2011 p.3)

Silva (2015), in research about Affection in Pedagogical Practice and in Educators Training, states that every relationship is based on affection. In distance education, during courses that foresee such interaction, that affection is demonstrated through the written and verbal communication that happens between educators and students, reaching for established interpersonal relationships at the I-Thou level (Thou as individual, not objectified² (MARCONDES FILHO, 2007b apud CLEMENTINO, 2008) and therefore humanizing the process and reducing the perception of distance. Although the form of connection among the pedagogical agents (course coordination, professor or tutor, and student) in an online learning course is primarily by writing, the voice is receiving more focus over the years, essentially due to improvement in the internet connection services and to several new softwares, which allow for real-time communication, and they have been widely used in distance education. Moraes ([n.d.],b), who has been studying the tendency of technology in people's lives, believes that voice will be increasingly used, as that is strong in human nature, especially in this phase when humanization is being requested over data and rationality. In teaching, as per Lins (2017), voice is one of the main work tools of educators, and one of the most effective ways for human interaction. That way, synchronous activities should be valued in distance education courses.

Nevertheless, although written and verbal communication seems very natural and familiar to us at first, both require high level attention as words are responsible for conveying emotion, affection, and trust, and as the use of the wrong word or a phrase weakly formed, for example, can generate a space for potential misunderstandings among the parties involved. Due to the fact that verbal facilitation has been the pedagogical strategy most often used inside the classroom, Servilha and Costa (2015) studied vocal knowledge and its importance as a pedagogical resource at the university level. As a result, students informed that a paused, clear, and direct speech motivates them and holds their attention for its firmness and pleasantness. On the other hand, a voice that is high pitched, shrill, and high in volume is unpleasant, uninteresting, and reluctant, transmitting insecurity. That way, in order to try to avoid the wrong words, terms, or phrases, attention and planning are required when choosing vocal resources in distance education. Keeping a natural speech, trying to make it inviting for the student to stay and to participate in the moment, are just as important.

The importance of experiences in the teaching-learning process: Whether in person or distance learning, and just like in other sectors of economy, education is facing the need to exceed the relationship with student-clients for the delivery of experiences. Schmitt states that experiences "(...) offer sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational values which substitute functional values" (1999, p. 57 apud VASCONCELLOS et al, 2017). When we work with sensory stimuli as generators of the experience to students in the online world, our attention is called to the increased use of the human voice in

² Martin Buber says there are two types of relationships that one can establish with someone else: I-Thou and I-It. The first one is ontological, close, and direct with something or someone who you are interacting with. The second one is cognitive, but it is a distanced relationship between subject and object. (MARCONDES FILHO, 2007b apud CLEMENTINO, 2008)

interactions. In a virtual learning environment, writing still dominates the relationships with students yet the importance of voice, human or artificial/robotic, is growing. Communication by voice is characterized by its easiness and fluidity and has a high sensorial power. Voice has been occupying spaces from the musical experience in stores, at places with personalized soundtracks, all the way to corporations offering augmented reality, for example an audio explaining the relationship of a person at home with the place and the objects. (MORAES, [n.d.].a.) According to Puliti (2020), technological solutions for audio recording and voice recognition have made the use of mobile message applications more democratic. Voice, as the first sense used by humans to communicate, and after being incorporated to the digital applications, resulted in a simpler and more intuitive channel. Several audiences have benefited from audio recording, allowing them to communicate with people that did not know how to write or had difficulties to type or to find the keys. Puliti (2020) states that in addition to those advantages, voice has a great advantage when compared to other means of communication, which is the tone. That is a possibility for the expression to be improved, and to become more complete.

Technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, 360° cameras, softwares for collaborative project development, and games have started to stand out to compose virtual classes. The acceleration of the use of new technologies will allow for innovative pedagogic strategies to be created in the online universe of education, providing interactive experiences between the players of the teaching and learning process. The emotional value of an educational experience may be noticed with the sharing and the group spirit that come from the professors-students relationship. Attention is called by the platforms for sharing, which will contribute greatly for this scenery to be established and expanded, allowing for this experience of distance education courses to be constructed and maintained. According to Porto (2018), some schools glimpsed at the future of learning as the synergy of platforms, as remixing, as the technologies for sharing, as the decentralization and dematerialization, as the return to humanism and to affection. Penso (2019) considers that, as we analyse the relationship between educators of the millennial generation³ we can notice the development of collaborative experiences in favor of engagement and, as per the author, that experience will be relevant to generate empathy and to reach for content comprehension, considering sympathy and the sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

The research “Technological Resources in Distance Education as Facilitators of the Construction of Knowledge: An analysis of students’ perception,” which is being conducted at a University Center in the city of São Paulo, is the study generator of this article and it is being developed through bibliographical and documental research, based on the qualitative approach regarding the means (GIL, 2008). As for the ends, it is a descriptive study that, according to Vergara (1997), intends to dive into a specific subject, exploring its variables, and at the same time describes the phenomenon. Vergara (1997), still, affirms that the descriptive research intends to describe characteristics, behaviors, and reactions of a certain sample. This type of research establishes a relation between the variables at the object of the analysed study. The results found earlier in that ongoing research, and especially the current context of the pandemic, fostered connections about the importance and the impact of affective communication when interacting with students. That allowed the researchers to understand a smaller transactional distance from them. They feel they are in a more humane relationship. It reinforces that technology is just a vehicle. Such conclusion took us to a new phase of the research, in which the reflections presented in this article will

be supporting its continuity. In the new phase students’ perception on the affective communication adopted will be recorded.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present article introduced, by the proposed goal and by the bibliographic review, how the communication aspects of online remote courses can benefit the humanization of the relationships, and how this perception can benefit the students’ experience. By considering humanizing relationships in the teaching and learning process in distance education, such a fundamental aspect in the world we live in, where there is a greater use of digital environments to host several activities, communication needs to be closer to the students in a way that it builds affectionate relationships. The execution of the teaching and learning process must promote integration between students, classmates, and professors. In a distance education courses environment, where most of the student's journey happens, the experiences offered must consider the student’s satisfaction, their desire to be present, to relate to others there, which is their place to have relationships with the faculty and with classmates. In this context, the researchers intend to advance in the study, using documental research just as descriptive research, so that new inter-relations can be made, analysing which communicational resources can benefit humanized communication in online remote educational environments.

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³Millennial, or Generation Y, is the name of the generation born at the turn of the millennium. It is a generation from the digital era, the first age cut including people that were born already involved by the current technology, like videogames and the internet.

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