

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS - A PLEDGE FOR THE SUCCESSFUL CAREER OF THE STUDENTS IN "SOCIAL ACTIVITIES"³

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Abstract: *The paper considers the forming and subsequent development of communication skills as essential for the professional realization of bachelor students in "Social activities" due to the central role of the different communication practices in social work. The traditional understanding supposes that the communication skills and competencies have a complementary character for improving the education of social workers. The present paper is aiming to show that they are implicit both for the quality of social work and the successful realization in the field of social activities. A model of building and developing relevant communicative skills and competencies during the bachelor education in "Social Activities" is also proposed, based on the nature of the specialty and the global trends in providing social services.*

Keywords: *social work, communication skills, bachelor education in "Social Activities"*

JEL Codes: *I20, I21, O15*

INTRODUCTION

Communication competence is a fundamental component of social workers' professional performance, and the effectiveness of this competence is implicitly related with the development of communications skills, which might be considered as core substance of the so-called soft skills. Whithin the traditional interpretation of the scope of communication skilles are usually included the oral, the listening, the writing and the presentation skills are traditionally defined as communication skills, determining the individual's communication competence.

Further developments extend this traditional understanding of the communications skills with non-verbal communication and the team-based social interactions, as well. The last generally refers to the interpersonal communication skills, the cross-cultural communication skills and the negotiation skills, being a two-way symmetric or asymmetric process with more or less active feedback.

Scince the end of 20th age these skills are considered as part of the social competence, term wich is often used as synonymous of the interpersonal communicative competence (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1989). Indeed, the interpersonal communicative competence is dealing with the relevant interpersonal communication skills and the contemporary understanding for them includes the personal motivation and communication goals, underpinned by emotional-cognitive and behavioural dementions of the social interaction (Koprovskaa, 2020; Koprovskaa, 2010; Reith-Hall & Montgomery, 2019; Hargie, 2021).

Considering that the communication determines the quality and sustainability of the social interaction, which is essential for the social work it should be mentioned that the complexity and the diversity of the communication acts in social work as well as the specifics of the social activities as professional occupation make the development of communication skills and competence essential for the future specialists. In addition, the latest development of the communication technologies and the remote and digital social workers'practice require the enlargement of even of the modern understanding of communications skills for this area with the digital communication skills and on-line ethics (Richards, Ruch& Trevithick,2004, Garrett, 2005).

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The present paper is aiming to discuss the latest improvements in the communication practice, concerning the development of efficient communication skills for future social workers, as well to outline a model of minimum necessary set of communication skills that guarantee the successful professional realization of the students in bachelor program "Social activities".

EXPOSITION

The communication practice in social work is much more complicated than the traditional professional communication in any other field not only because of diverse cultural, educational, religious, social-economic and health status of the targeted individual or groups, but due to the wide range of challenges/deficiency and/or other complicated life issues and obstacles that they face and the substantial need of support, trust and empathy that their experience and expect in communication.

The last means that the communication in social work is by nature intentional, responsive to the needs and social service user-centered, engaged by transparently communicated the professional rules, ethics, standards, obligations and constraints. Such type of communication requires the knowledge, the skills and the ability to:

- Identify and analyze the significant dynamic features of the communication environment;
- Define the professional objectives aiming to achieve establishing and sustaining communication with the social services users;
- Assess the communicators expectations, needs, motivation, behavioural and cognitive model of experiencing the reality;
- Assess the constraints and the deficiencies that might affect the communication;
- Clearly state and distinguish the professional role from personal goals and emotions;
- Identify the area(s) of mutual understanding, those that are subject of negotiations and undisputable questions;
- Demonstrate self-awareness, self-confidence and cultural tolerance with the purpose to understand the social-cultural practice of the user as central to effective communication in social work;
- Define the scope of the specific user's current difficulties in clear and understandable way including positive feedback on ability of the user to cope with the constraints and challenges together with the social worker. This component requires development of analytical and critical-thinking as part of the communication competence of the social worker, together the responsive, empathetic communication style which are the necessary background for enabling the service user to face, understand, reconsider and act toward overcoming the existing limitations.

CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned communication skills result in the communication and social competences of the social workers and refer to a consistent and consecutive building of educational program which will ensure the development of these skills in parallel with the specialized knowledge acquired during the curricula. Such type of program is the bachelor program in "Social activities" after its latest update in 2020/2021 where the essence of communication knowledge is given in the curriculum of "Basics of communication" which creates the general background for further development and improvements of communication skills and competence which become an integrated component of each next curriculum concerning the specifics of social work.

This is one of the possible solutions that can be applied to ensure the successful carrier of the future social workers. The other opportunity is to develop and establish within the bachelor program a communication module where with regard of the stage of the development of the student during the bachelor program he/she is prepared to communicate professionally, educated to do it, trained to acquire own experience in practical environment for educational purposes, and finally enable to demonstrate the achievements and the skills developed together with a prominent practitioner or educator (Howard, McMillen & Pollio, 2003; Hargie, 2021; Munford & Sanders, 2015; Healy, 2014).

In such case the interdisciplinary links and the consecutive semestrial upgrade of the communication knowledge for developing communication skills are mandatory.

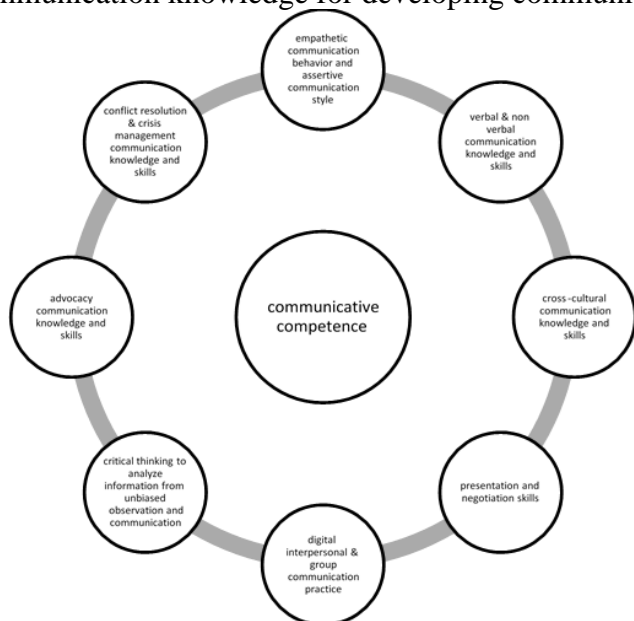


Fig.1. Communicative competence map

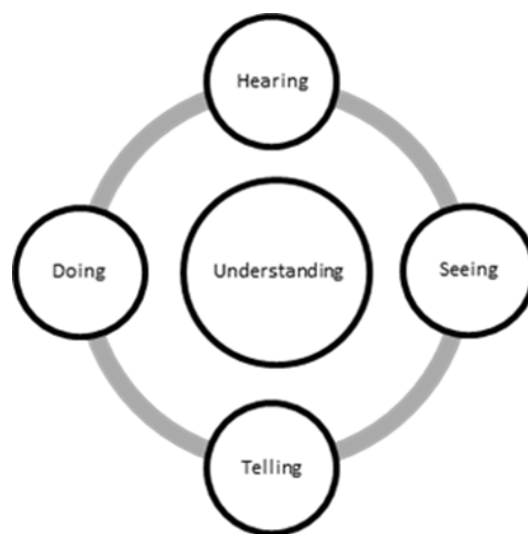


Fig.2 Empathy map

It should be clearly stated that the social competence, emotional intelligence and communication competence are interdependent, interrelated and their development during the bachelor educational cycle in social activities is obligatory. This reference also to the synchronicity between the development of so-called empathy map of the students (see Fig.2) with the communicative competence map (see Fig.2).

The empathy map reflects to the social competence and the professional abilities and success of the future social workers, and in the same time is interdependent of the coherence and the consecutive improvements in the communicative competence map of the students during the educational process.

Social activities are a professional practice requiring development and life-long improvement of diverse set of competences and skills. Professionals in this field need to develop in addition a unique skill set based on their individuality, perceptions and self-determination and these two sets are framing the professional practice and pledge it success or when they are not well adjusted and harmonized can ruine your carrier. Learning about these required skills is mandatory for the educating institutions and the clear determination of this need can help for the coherent development of the future social workers'abilities.

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