The notion of evidence in didactics

Towards an epistemology from abstract to concrete in didactics of languages and history

Le Hénaff, Carole - Cariou, Didier
ARCD Conference - October 11th 2018
Introduction

● How can an exemplification provide evidence?

● It's a way of making things visible, obvious

● It means producing a finer description of teaching practices so as to better understand them and to better act "upon" them

● The idea is to be able to understand teaching practices to transform them, and to transform practices in order to understand them, etc

→ Evidence is produced by a process of elevation from abstract to concrete
The confrontation with the milieu

- In the Joint Action Theory in Didactics, one assertion is that "if the student acts on his own movement / by himself, then learning is effective" → this is an abstract formula, as a starting point

- To do this, the teacher directs the student's attention by moving back and forth along a gradient between reticence and expression

- The teacher is reticent so that the student acts by himself
- The teacher is at the same time expressive so that the student knows how to act

- We can specify the formula as follows: "The proper orientation of students in the milieu requires specific expression work by the teacher." »

- Two examples, in History and in English
In History

- Presentation of the situation
- 4th grade, history lesson on Charlemagne's empire
- In the previous lesson, the nature of Charlemagne's power as emperor was discussed.
- In this lesson, the class studies the map of Charlemagne's empire to understand that, spatially, an empire is made up of several kingdoms.
The gradient of reticence and expression

1. The identification of the document

It is achieved by a Topaz effect (with more expression than reticence)

When the teacher says « **une**... » (tdp 42), this means that the document cannot be « **un** » text. The professor strongly suggests that the document can be « **une** » image or « **une** » map.

By expressing the gender of the expected word, she directs the students to the expected word (« map »). The students cannot act by themselves.
2. The identification of the empire on the map

The teacher asks how it is known that the map represents an empire.

The teacher thus suggests, without explicitly saying it, that the students should look at the map for the cartographic figure that indicates an empire (with as much reticence as expression). The student Guillaume knows what he must be looking for (« black traces ») (#46). He is able to act by himself.
What does the study of Charlemagne’s empire map teaches us?

It outlines the teacher’s position on the gradient of expression and reticence to guide students through the semiotic forms of the milieu.

What new abstract formula based on the analysis of this concrete situation?

→ “Through the dialectics of reticence and expression, the professor leads the students to identify relevant elements of a document (‘black traces’) linked to knowledge (Charlemagne’s empire). In this situation, this dialectics leads the joint action of teacher and students.”
In English

- The situation studied
- Secondary school class, working on the theme of heroism
- Broadcast a 2-minute video to students about a "heroic" American girl (a person born without arms, who becomes an airplane pilot)
- Before the video is shown, the teacher encourages students to write down the "important words" they hear in the video
- Prior to the screening of the video, a questionnaire was distributed to the students with questions to assess their understanding of the narrative content of the video.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>This is a paper, you read it. So we're going to watch a video about a woman, Jessica. And these are the different questions. What does Jessica remember when she was a child? Why did she have such a wish? What was her mother's reaction when Jessica was born? Why? What do you love about her mother's testimony, OK? Pick up as many keywords as you can. So I play the video.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(after the video) Can we correct just a few things? So what does she remember when she was a child? Yes Océane?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>She wanted to fly like wonderwoman!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Wonderwoman, exactly! Exactly, very good, OK! She wanted to fly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OK! Why? One key word you have understood! She was angry of how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Limited, exactly! OK. Her mother's reactions, do you have any keywords? What did you understand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>She was depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Depressed! Very good, very good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What does the analysis of this situation tell us about the orientation of students in the didactic milieu, with the help of the teacher’s specific expression?

The teacher expresses the expectation of a certain exploration of the milieu. She drew attention to the need to keep records of the viewing in the form of keywords. The answers to the questions asked, using keywords, replace the study of the milieu. Still, the questions make sense for the students because they answer them properly. The teacher trains them to pay attention to the "right place".

By moving from the abstract formula to its implementation, we get an evidence that "the modalities of contact with a milieu, here, a video, in a foreign language are decisive for the activities of comprehension" (Le Hénaff, to be published).
Abstract formula: "The proper orientation of students in the milieu requires specific expression work by the teacher".

Thanks to the process of elevation from abstract to concrete, new formulas produced:

In History: "The joint action of teacher and students makes it possible to point relevant elements of a historical document so as to establish links with knowledge" (Athias & Cariou, to be published).

In English: "The modalities of access to a video in a foreign language are decisive for understanding" (Le Hénaff, to be published).

New abstract formula: "The proper orientation of students in the milieu requires specific expression work by the teacher, which consists in suggesting to look at the right place". The elevation from abstract to concrete has allowed us to specify an abstract formula.


Any questions?