

## Communicative Space of Educational Classes as a Condition for Successful Adult Education

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**Abstract:** Currently, adult education is a diverse and mobile system of educational services. Given the current situation, adult education is designed to fill the list of missing competencies of a modern specialist, among which soft skills are important. Soft skills are personal qualities that allow you to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people and are equally necessary for both everyday life and professional activities. One way to solve the problem of forming soft skills of adult learners is to create an appropriate communication space in the educational classes. The purpose of the study is to substantiate theoretically, create and evaluate the communicative space of educational classes in adult education and develop guidelines for its modelling. The experimental work on modelling of the communicative space of training was carried out in the educational process of the Institute of Advanced Training and Retraining of the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University. Forty-two adult learners (people, who decided to receive additional qualification) of the retraining course “Educational activity of experts” studying the didactics participated in the experimental work. The assessment of the communicative space of studies was carried out according to three criteria: “*Assessment of the process*”, “*Assessment of satisfaction*” and “*Assessment of the outcome*”. The empirical results of testing the communicative space of educational classes were obtained by observing the work of adult learners in the educational classes, analysing the products of their activity, questioning, and polling. According to the results obtained, the communicative space of educational classes in adult education allows you to create the optimal educational environment that contributes to the effective assimilation of the content of the discipline by adult learners, improving their soft skills. These results made it possible to formulate guidelines for modelling the communicative space of educational classes in adult education. The suggested guidelines can be used by teachers in organizing formal and informal adult education.

**Keywords:** communicative space, educational classes, adult education, adult learners.

### Introduction

The ongoing transformations in various spheres of life in many countries, the commonality of global issues, have led to the emergence of fundamentally new issues in the field of education. For people and society, the importance of continuing education throughout life has increased (Nevdakh, 2015).

Not long ago, man existed in the framework of only one professional activity. Professional education received at a university, technical school or vocational school has served him all his life. A change of profession was rare. In modern society, the change of specialty, profession, work, is increasingly happening several times throughout the life of a particular person. This actualizes the importance of adult education.

Currently, adult education is a diverse and mobile system of educational services. In pedagogical theory, adult education is considered as auxiliary, supplementing basic education, as one of the forms of social activity of a person. According to the current situation, adult education is designed to fill the list of missing competencies of a modern specialist (Morris, 2019; Rubenson, 2019; Schreiber-Barsch, Mauch, 2019; Gedvilienė et al., 2018). As noted in a number of studies (Attila, Enikő, 2018; Volger et al., 2018; Cronin, Cronin, 1992), for employers it is important not only the hard skills formed by learners, but also additional knowledge and skills that cannot be obtained at the university: creativity, responsibility, courtesy. They are called "soft skills". The results of a study conducted at Harvard University and Stanford Research Institute show that the contribution of hard skills to the professional success of an employee is only 15 %, while soft skills determine the remaining 85 % (Madsen, 2018).

The Boston Consulting Group also conducted a study of the importance of soft skills for modern employers. It turned out that communication skills are most in demand: 79 % of respondents put them in

the first place. The following ones are active life position - 78 %, analytical thinking - 77 %, endurance - 75 %, ability to work in a team - 74 %, desire to achieve goals - 70 %, ability to resolve conflicts - 54 %, ability to be inspired by new ideas - 54 %, creativity - 43 %, reliability - 42 % (Nicholson, Nairn, 2006).

Thus, soft skills are personal qualities that allow you to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people and are equally necessary for both everyday life and professional activities. Significant soft skills include communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving skills, creativity, teamwork, negotiation skills, self-organization, time management, conflict resolution skills, respect for the culture of other nations, general knowledge, responsibility, etiquette and good manners, courtesy, self-esteem, sociability, honesty, sympathy, work ethic. And this is not the whole list. Conventionally, “soft skills” can be divided into three groups: personal qualities, interpersonal skills and additional knowledge (McGowan, 2015).

One way to solve the problem of forming soft skills of adult learners is to create an appropriate communication space in the educational classes.

The purpose of the study is to substantiate theoretically, create and evaluate the communicative space of educational classes in adult education and develop guidelines for its modelling.

### **Methodology**

In the theoretical basis of the study there are the conceptual ideas of subject-actional, competency-based, andragogical and communicative (dialogical) approaches.

Research tasks:

1. To reveal the essential characteristics of the communicative space of educational classes.
2. To determine the goals, functions and logic of modelling the communicative space of educational classes in adult education.
3. To test in the course of experimental work and evaluate the communicative space of educational classes in adult education.
4. To develop the guidelines for modelling of the communicative space of educational classes in adult education on the basis of the obtained empirical results.

On the basis of the methodological approaches the essential characteristics of modelling the communicative space of educational classes were revealed and the goals, functions and logic of the communicative space of educational classes were determined.

The experimental work on modelling of the communicative space of training was carried out in the educational process of the Institute of Advanced Training and Retraining of the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University in 2016. Forty-two adult learners (people, who decided to receive additional qualification) of the retraining course “Educational activity of experts” studying the didactics participated in the experimental work.

The assessment of the communicative space of studies was carried out according to three criteria:

“*Assessment of the process*” is the assessment of the methods of organizing educational classes (lectures and seminars) to ensure the dialogical interaction of the educational process subjects in the communicative space.

“*Assessment of satisfaction*” is the assessment of the communicative space of educational classes in terms of interest and learner’s satisfaction referring to participation in the educational process.

“*Assessment of the outcome*” is the qualitative assessment and self-assessment of changes in the level of formation of soft skills among learners as a result of interaction in the communicative space.

The empirical results of testing the communicative space of educational classes were obtained by observing the work of adult learners in the educational classes, analysing the products of their activity, questioning, and polling. These results made it possible to formulate guidelines for modelling the communicative space of educational classes in adult education.

## Results and Discussion

The problem of communicative space is one of the modern and relevant in pedagogical science. This is due to the need to attract various subjective communities to solve educational problems in the socio-cultural plan, which is essential for adult education. The communicative space of educational classes is the totality of the subjects of interaction, communicative-educational objects and means, between which logical relationships are established. These relationships are determined by their functional specificity in the educational process.

The goals of the communicative space of educational classes are oriented at creating a system of interconnected learning situations aimed, on the one hand, at mastering the material studied by adult learners, and on the other hand, at developing soft skills, as well as satisfying cognitive, moral, aesthetic, creative and other human needs, to expand and strengthen empathic interaction, to establish trusting relationships with other people and social groups. The communicative space of educational classes should be aimed at organizing a multi-subjective interaction that ensures the development of professional activities, business communication and creativity by adult learners, which contributes to the successful professional and personal formation of future specialists.

The functions of the communicative space of educational classes have their own distinctive features.

1. The information function is to transmit through communication certain information of everyday, educational, methodical, search, research and another plan. The implementation of this function contributes to the transformation of accumulated life experience, scientific knowledge and it also provides the process of introducing the person to the material and spiritual values of society.
2. The socializing function contributes to the assimilation of sociocultural experience, cultural, moral and professional values, to the development of the ability to hear your interlocutor, to interact empathically, to participate in joint activities.
3. The motivational function encourages adult learners to fulfil the need for contact with another person, exchange personal spiritual values, improve their own communicative experience, remove psychological clamps, and increase self-esteem and self-confidence.
4. The reflective function allows adult learners to assess adequately their communication skills, the ability to build interaction with other people, the ability to work in a team.

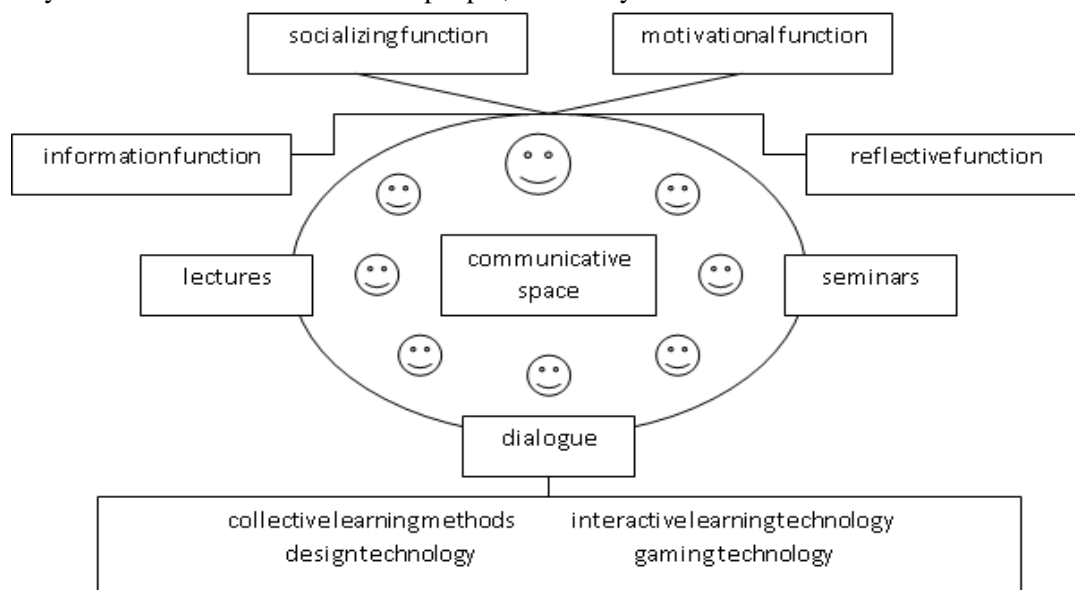


Figure 1. Communication space of educational classes.

The general logic of modelling the communicative space of educational classes involves the creation of conditions for the dissemination of educational information, the emergence of dialogue, which can lead to the transformation of subjective knowledge of an adult learner, the formation of attitudes for subsequent productive interaction (Figure 1). The quality of the communicative space of educational

classes is determined by the quality of the content of the educational program for adult education, a list of information and communication tools, social relations, as well as the links between the spatial-subject and social components. Depending on the form of organization of the educational process, the modelling of the communicative space will have its own specifics.

One of the common forms of conducting educational classes in adult education is a lecture. It performs scientific, educational, and worldview functions, and sometimes serves as the main source of information in case of having no textbooks. Despite the strengthening of the practice-oriented educational process in the curriculum, lectures are given a certain number of hours. Currently, this form is undergoing significant changes. The lecture should meet modern requirements and educational standards and also be informative. The way of presenting the material is changing, as well as the nature of the interaction with learners.

The typology of lectures is considered by R.S. Pionova (2005). The author describes such types as classical or traditional lecture, problem lecture, discussion lecture, lecture - audio visualization, expert invitation lecture. All of these types of lectures can be used in adult education. However, they have different potential in the formation of soft skills of learners. Focusing on the indicated typology, the potential of different types of lectures in the formation of soft skills are presented in table 1.

Table 1

**The lectures potential in soft skills formation**

<b>The types of lectures</b>	<b>Brief characteristic</b>	<b>The lecture potential in soft skills formation</b>
Classical or traditional lecture	Contains the latest scientific information, highlights unresolved issues in a specific field of science	Should arouse interest in the discipline being studied, give an orientation to independent work, analysis and educational research, general knowledge
Problem lecture	Includes a series of problematic questions. Learners get involved in thinking and answering them	Activates students, promotes the development of analytical thinking, revitalizes the lecture
Discussion lecture	Conducted on complex hypothetical topics, having an ambiguous interpretation or decision	Promotes the development of critical thinking, analysis, communication skills, the ability to stand for their position, respect for others
Lecture-Audio visualization	Conducted using audio-visual materials, involves their extensive commenting, creating problem situations or the inclusion of problematic issues	Activates visual, auditory analysers, contributes to the development of critical thinking
Expert invitation lecture	In addition to the teacher, another 2-3 specialists participate in the lecture: the experts on the topic of the lesson, who present different points of view on the topic of the lesson. This leads to a problematic situation, dialogue	Promotes the development of communication skills, critical thinking, etiquette and good manners, self-esteem

The productivity of any type of lecture depends on a number of factors:

- depth and scientific content;
- clear structure;
- evidence and persuasion of the position of the teacher;
- teacher's contact with the audience, the degree of interaction;
- teacher's speech culture, lecture manners;
- use of visual and audio-visual media.

In adult education, any lecture should be dialogical in nature. Adult learners get educational information and transform it through the prism of accumulated life experience. The teacher should be prepared to meet the educational needs of adult learners and build a dialogue during the lecture based on their experience.

The modelling of the communicative space in the seminars is based on approaches to understanding the essence of interpersonal communication and its functions. Interpersonal communication is a process of speech interaction both between adult learners and the teacher, adult learners among themselves and their impact on each other. Here, the emotional factor plays an important role. The productivity of the interaction is ensured by the ability of adult learners to perceive emotionally each other – the empathy. The complexity of modelling is explained by the fact that interpersonal communication is implemented in various forms (direct, indirect, interviews, debates, public speeches), each of which has its own characteristics, due to the communicative situation.

At seminars, the effectiveness of communication in particular situations (the presence of other members of the group, their number, spatial and temporal characteristics) are of great importance. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that for each adult learner, effectiveness has its own assessment. The teacher should pay special attention to interpersonal communication as a process, the main components of which are mechanisms related to the perception, understanding, reproduction, processing of information by the subjects of interaction.

Feedback allows you to get information about the real interests and the current state of the adult learner at the time of interaction. The variability of the methods used in the classroom ensures the implementation of a dialogical approach in the interaction of subjects, where each participant in the communicative space has the right to an individual opinion, the change of which is possible during the dialogue. It is necessary to intensify constantly the mental and speech activity of adult learners - subjects of the communicative space, emotionally reflecting all aspects of communicative activity through the assimilation of the concepts studied.

The organization of the communicative space in the educational classes is also ensured by the use of a variety of author's pedagogical technologies, the characteristic features of which are: dialogism, cooperation, co-creation, and focus on the formation of an individual style of professional activity. In this case, conditions are created for the development of educational activities, the formation of adult learners' activity, their awareness of cognitive actions and the assimilation of the content of educational material. The use of teaching technologies that involve work in small groups will help to increase the productivity of the communicative space in the educational classes. This may be the technology of collective learning methods, design technology, interactive learning technology, gaming technology (Nevdakh, 2019).

Let us present the results of modelling the communicative space in educational classes with adult learners of the specialty retraining "Pedagogical activity of specialists" in the study of didactics. The assessment of the communicative space of educational classes was carried out according to three criteria: "Assessment of the process", "Assessment of satisfaction", "Assessment of the outcome".

#### *"Assessment of the process"*

Educational classes with adult learners were organized in the logic of modelling described above. According to the curriculum, 36 hours are allocated for the study of didactics. Of these, 20 hours of lecture, 16 hours of seminars. Four lectures were held in the traditional way using multimedia accompaniment, two - problem lectures, two - lectures-discussions, two - lectures in which students assisted the teacher. All seminars were conducted using interactive teaching methods and technologies, collective teaching methods, project training, and games. Using of these methods and technologies supposed to involve all learners in active cognitive activity and communication.

In the course of organized interaction, adult learners get to know each other. The comfortable state of the listener largely depends on the colleagues around him, so it is necessary to create conditions so that learners can get to know each other better. This will allow building relationships during training, taking into account the characteristics of temperament, character, value orientations of the subjects of interaction. Therefore, at the initial stage of interaction, it is important to assess the readiness of a group of learners to participate in joint tasks and cooperation.

According to the results of a survey of listeners, 74 % of respondents were interested in joint creative activity in the classroom, 60 % highly appreciated the ability to cooperate, 62 % - the ability to resolve conflicts creatively. The data obtained indicate that most listeners are serious about joint activities. This

was a positive moment in mastering the content of the discipline and allowed the teacher to involve learners (individually and in groups) into performing learning tasks without additional preparatory exercises.

Assessing the possibilities of organizing training sessions to ensure dialogue interaction, 64 % of listeners noted the importance and necessity of holding classical lectures. Studying in conditions of time pressure, listeners appreciate the proposed information on the discipline. But at the same time, they note that conducting lectures in an unconventional form to a greater extent encourages reflection, the formulation of own conclusions and judgments, and the need for discussion in a group. 100 % of respondents praised the interactive nature of the seminars.

As experience shows, for listeners who do not have a pedagogical education, the study of didactics causes some difficulties associated with ambiguous definitions of concepts, the approaches of various authors to the consideration of pedagogical phenomena, and the comparison of pedagogical knowledge with real practice. When the educational information is hard to understand it may cause the formation of bad attitude towards the discipline being studied. And the situation when the learner isn't aware enough of the pedagogical terms and categories may cause difficulties in organizing interpersonal communication. In this case, motivation plays an important role. The teacher needs in the process of updating the knowledge of listeners to encourage them to actively engage in discussion of issues and the implementation of practical tasks. It is important to create a success situation conducive to a change in attitudes toward learning.

#### *“Assessment of satisfaction”*

The content of the communicative space in the didactic classes performed the dialogue, during which the ability to hear and understand each other was determined. Comfortability of interaction in the communicative space was noted by 91 % of listeners. Of these, 79 % indicated the importance of allowing all members of the group to express their own opinions; 64 % - encourage strong arguments and valuable suggestions; 57 % - noted the importance of constructive criticism in the classroom; 64 % - drew attention to the need to achieve accuracy and objectivity when presenting information for discussion in a group; 95 % - respect the opinions of other groups and participants in the interaction.

If we consider the communicative space of educational classes from the point of view of the educational opportunities provided by it, then the integrative quality criterion is the ability to provide all subjects of the educational process with a system of opportunities for full-fledged personal and professional development in the process of multi-subjective interaction, satisfying the complex of needs of adult learners, thus creating appropriate motivation for their activity. Therefore, the use of soft skills is possible only when there is the ability of appropriate usage of various behaviour models, understanding of common and personal interests, priorities ranking and making a choice. The development of these skills is aimed at forming the ability of an adult learner to see and distinguish many options for the development of the situation, make adequate decisions, thereby ensuring his professional and personal viability.

#### *“Assessment of the outcome”*

Upon completion of the study of didactics, adult learners took an exam. Formally, all learners passed the exam and received fairly high scores. However, it should be noted that due to the use of technologies that activate the learner's independent work on searching the necessary information to perform educational tasks, organize constructive interaction in the classroom, the answers to theoretical questions were informative. The adult learners tried to explain the didactic phenomena and processes using the terminology of pedagogy.

The practical part of the exam included the performance of practice-oriented tasks (individual and in groups). This part of the exam seemed to adult learners no less difficult than theoretical. The learners who were less experienced in teaching felt more anxiety. In these situations, the effective experience of interaction in the conditions of the communicative space of educational classes was used. When learner's reference group persons (teachers, colleagues) highly value his abilities and assure him that he is able to overcome difficulties, the degree of self-realization increases, thereby ensuring qualitative changes in learner's personality. Observing how others act in difficult situations changes the learners' judgment about their own abilities, helps to acquire useful skills, creates the basis for revealing the self-

fulfilling potential of a person, reflecting the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with oneself, expressed in critical assessments on one's own activities.

The learners were asked to carry out self-estimation and indicate those soft skills that, in their opinion, they were able to improve in the process of interaction in the conditions of the communicative space of educational classes. The first ten soft skills in terms of the number of choices were presented in the following order: communication skills (88 %), teamwork (83 %), problem solving skills (81 %), general knowledge (76 %), critical thinking (74 %), sympathy (71 %), self-organization (67 %), respect other people (62 %), responsibility (60 %), self-esteem (57 %).

Thus, according to the results obtained, the communicative space of educational classes in adult education allows you to create the optimal educational environment that contributes to the effective assimilation of the content of the discipline by adult learners, improving their communication skills, constructive interaction experience and other soft skills.

## Conclusions

The communicative space of educational classes involves the active interaction of all subjects of the training process in adult education. Creating a system of interconnected learning situations, on the one hand, is aimed at mastering the material studied by adult learners, and on the other hand, it is aimed at developing soft skills. The functions of the communicative space of educational classes (informational, socializing, motivational, reflective) contribute to the assimilation of social and cultural experience by adult learners, the exchange of personal spiritual values, the improvement of their own communicative experience, the development of the ability to build interaction with other people, to work in a team.

Modelling of the communicative space of lectures, seminars and workshops involves creating the conditions for the dissemination of educational information, the emergence of dialogue, the organization of multi-subject interaction and promotes the development of soft skills of adult learners. This has been confirmed in the empirical study.

The results of theoretical generalization and empirical study made it possible to formulate guidelines, which are inherently presented in the text. In the process of modelling the communicative space of educational classes in adult education, the teacher should:

- to know the features of adult learning, the requirements of educational standards and be able to plan their activities to achieve the planned learning outcomes, be able to assess the readiness of a group of learners to participate in joint tasks and cooperation;
- to know and be able to apply various methods of conducting lectures and seminars, to determine their potential in the formation of certain soft skills; to take into account the specifics of modelling the communicative space, depending on the choice of the form of organization of the educational process;
- to apply the means (didactic materials, sets of multilevel tasks, technical training tools), methods, technologies for organizing the interaction of adult learners and select them in accordance with the objectives of the training.

In educational classes the teacher should:

- to pay special attention to interpersonal communication (the specifics of the perception, understanding, reproduction, processing of information by the subjects of interaction);
- to ensure the implementation of a dialogical approach in the interaction of subjects, where each participant in the communicative space has the right to an individual opinion, the change of which is possible during the dialogue;
- to intensify constantly the mental and speech activity of adult learners, emotionally reflecting all aspects of communicative activity through the assimilation of the concepts studied;
- to create a success situation to a change in attitudes toward learning.

The level, effectiveness and safety of the communicative space of educational classes depend on the professionalism of the teacher, on his ability to organize multi-subjective interaction in the communicative space, to ensure the motivated inclusion of all subjects in educational activities.

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