

Communication or Education ?

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Every time we scientists present science-related topics to colleagues or non-experts we do scientific communication.

This includes describing the results of a research, the science behind a natural phenomenon, the parameters of a natural event. It must be remarked that scientific communication greatly differs from risk communication although they often tend to be mixed up. Generally speaking scientific communication is made to inform other scientists, stakeholders, decision makers and journalists. The main aim of communication is then to address information while the aim of risk communication is to address actions, orders and behaviours to be adopted during emergencies

Most of the topics of scientific communication are also common to education, the aims and targets of which are nevertheless intuitively different. Education is in fact supposed to increase scientific knowledge, awareness and preparedness; in a word to form and not to inform.

Although the border between communication and education is very definite in motivation, it is not as same in practice also due to the mentioned overlapping of some matters. A state of alarm or emergency may turn education in communication or been misunderstood as such, while mere education is sometime mislead as communication especially in high hazardous areas.

A thorough discussion of the correct application fields and usage of the two forms of public speaking requires a long debate taking into considerations many aspects of psychology, sociology, geoethics, philosophy and cannot be carried on easily. However here we only focus on one tool often used in communication and education by discussing on the role of cartoons, drawings and pictograms. Since they may be supportive to speeches or even substitute them, they can play, under certain circumstances, the double role being informative and foster knowledge. The discussion is carried out using some case histories and aims at enlarging the debate to other figurative arts or, more in general, to other tools.