SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD. COGNITIVE VARIABLES IN DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Human communication is not based solely on oral expression; it is a system with multiple channels because gestures, facial expressions, body position and even silence are acts of communication that conveys a meaning. They show the nature of the social bond existing or desired.

Based on the above idea I propose an approach to teaching communication from a psychosocial perspective. The theory behind this perspective on communication is that of the social representations. This theory helped to define, in the social psychology's area of research, directions which proved to be particularly fruitful for the analysis and understanding of individual interaction processes, intra-or intergroup.

Keywords: Social Representation, Commnunication, Didactic communication, Cognitive variables, Self Representation, Representation of others

Introduction

Known through Shannon, more as a technical situation, over time, communication has evolved and become, among other things, the object of study of social psychology. This perspective emphasizes that communication is a set of processes to exchange information and meanings between people who are in a particular situation. For social psychologists communication is an interaction, a dynamic phenomenon involving a transformation. Basically, communication is not only the transmission of information from a sender to a receiver, and vice versa, but it assumes the existence of two interlocutors who are in interaction. The actors that Shannon calls as sender and receiver are designated, from the psycho-social perspective, with the term "locutors" and are influenced in the process of communication by three types of variables: psychological, cognitive and social. I will first highlight the novelty that brings the study of communication theory of social representations, comparing it to the classical theory of Shannon. Next I will analyze how cognitive variables affect the didactic communication, from the general pattern of communication offered by Jean-Claude Abric (1999).

1. Social Representations in Communication

The understanding of communication differs depending on the area in which it is addressed from different perspectives of researcher's data, so we can

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talk about a variety of meanings of the concept of communication. One can see two major models of analysis of the communication that currently dominate the research field: a technical model, arising from the cybernetic approach and reflections and a psycho-sociological model, a result of the researches in social psychology. The model developed by Shannon (1948; 1952), within the information theory, has experienced considerable success. (Jakobson 1963) This is the result of research conducted by a number of specialists in telecommunications, supported in their work by a number of mathematicians, and answers a crucial question at that time for the telecommunications industry: how to improve the delivery of information - a signal - from one point to another, or, in other words, how such a message can be transmitted with optimal efficiency? (Vlăduțescu 2013a, 2013b)

Shannon defines communication as a transmission of a message from one place to another. Communication components are: sender, receiver, channel of communication and code. Transmitting the message is going from a sender by encoding and decoding operations to the receiver, and, in reverse, to the sender to establish a feedback. Emerged in the context of cybernetics, much appreciated by experts in information theory, Shannon's model was a real success among linguists of the time (Robins, 2004).

Jean-Claude Abric identifies two important drawbacks of the Shannon's model: first, it ignores completely that the communication involves individuals (or groups) who are undergoing a massive influence from psychological factors, social constraints, the systems of norms and values; secondly, it looks like a linear process communication (despite the fact that the feed-back is closing the system loop) and sequentially (Abric, 1999). Consequently Abric's definition of communication is different from that of Shannon: "Communication is the set of processes through which the exchange of information and meanings between individuals is realized in a given social situation" (Abric, 1999). This definition emphasizes the psychological specifics of human communication. This requires first an exchange of information, meanings. Thus, communication processes are essentially social; they are based on interaction and they are determined by it. Moreover, any communication is an interaction, so it appears as a dynamic phenomenon involving a transformation. Communication is subordinated to a process of mutual influence between several social actors. The conclusion is that we are not dealing with a sender and receiver, as Shanon argued, but interacting with two locutors: two interlocutors. Being based on interaction, communication is always a transaction between locutors. Sending the information and receiving it are simultaneous, and influenced by various psychological and social factors, so communication cannot be reduced to a mere transmission of information. Therefore communication is a social act, deliberately or unintentionally, consciously or not. This is in line with one of the axioms of new communications theorists: "One cannot not communicate." (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967).

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Human communication is not based solely on oral expression; it is a system with multiple channels because gestures, facial expressions, body position and even silence are acts of communication that conveys a meaning. They show the nature of the social bond existing or desired. The theory underlying this understanding of communication is that of social representations. (Jodelet 1991, Curelaru 2006, 2001, Neculau 1997) The term of "social representation" send explicitly to the theory developed since 1963 by S. Moscovici. () He has reformulated the concept of collective representation of Durkheim, proposing a nearly new concept, which has proved a perfect tool adapted to the diversity and plurality of representations, which organizes the symbolic relations in our modern societies. (Moscovici 1984, 1988, 2011)

W. Doise states that communication shapes the social representations and helps them to circulate. One of most important functions of communication is in regulating the relations between social actors. Representations serve to maintain a way of relation between groups, specifically organizing cognitive and evolutionary approach to the social environment. (Doise, 1997). J.C. Abric (1999) considers that „communication always has a purpose, a goal that can be explicit, implicit, or unconscious".

2. Cognitive variables in the didactic communication

The fact that the theory of social representations and that of mental images is a useful tool for investigating the educational field is proven by numerous works (Seca 2013, Strungă 2014, Iucu and Strungă 2014) Next, I will emphasize some aspects of its application in the didactic communication.

Interlocutor's cognitive system has an important role in how communication is done. Our behaviour is determined by our own cognitive system, by our specific way of thinking, to process information and to solve problems. The cognitive system of the speakers has an impact on the language that they use, on the verbal and nonverbal codes they use. The reception of messages between sender and receiver is so dependent on their cognitive systems. On the level of the didactic communication this aspect is very relevant because what is communicated has a predominantly cognitive character. Thus, if the teacher does not use a communication of the ideas as close to the common language, using an academic language, rigorous but also rigid, he risks to not effectively send the informative message. In drafting a message, the teacher should start from considering the cognitive system of the "target", means the intellectual level of his students. You cannot talk to pupils in primary as some of the secondary, even if the information is basically the same, say events occurred in Romanian history.

An important component of the cognitive system is the way we represent ourselves, the world around and relationships with others. The representation system of students is essential in the didactic communication. For this reason we have chosen to approach in this paper the problem of communication between

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teacher and student based on the theory of social representations. S. Moscovici (1997) stated that social representations should be seen as a specific way of understanding and communication, which creates both a reality and common sense.

J.C. Abric identifies three elements of the representation of the situation, which will play a key role in teacher-student communication: self, other, and the task to fulfil.

Self-representation includes the intimate Ego and the public Ego. The intimate Ego is the self-image of the individual, the way he is evaluating his own characteristics, his strengths and weaknesses. It's about how they consciously highlight his specificity, which, in his view, defines and distinguishes him from others. Specifically to the intimate Ego is that it is private, generally unknown to others and sometimes unexpressed publicly. That does not make it less important in determining individual behaviour. (Abric, 1999) Depending on how it perceives itself - as strong or weak - the student will adopt certain behaviour and the relationships he establishes with others will be entirely different. Similarly, the teacher who has a positive self-image will be able to be understood by students, to communicate effectively, but if he has a deficient self-image, then this will be visible by students, who will fail to relate to him, to achieve a communication educationally efficient. The Public self is said and expressed, is that image of ourselves that we give to the others, the way we present ourselves to them. He may be radically different from the intimate self (Abric, 1999). Some participants in the act of teaching (students and teachers) can provide a picture of themselves as very different from the real one. This can help a relationship of communication, but can be a real obstacle because the relationship will lose authenticity.

Representation of the other is the image of our communication partner, reflecting the way we perceive his personality, his psychological and cognitive characteristics, and his social status (Abric, 1999). If he has a favourable image about the teacher, the student will behave respectfully or friendly, but if the image is negative, it goes from no longer communicate or learn the course, up to absenteeism or sabotaging classes.

Representing the task or the context. Depending on the image it has about the task to fulfil, a student will adopt a certain intellectual attitude; will select problem-solving strategies and types of reasoning etc. Also, if a teacher wants to understand the nature of reactions and interactions that are established between him and students, and between students of a class, he will need to consider the meaning that they attribute to the context in which communication occurs.

Conclusions

The way in which the individual represents himself is essential in communication, because during this interaction he will behave according to the way it perceives and is perceived by others depending on context. He will adjust

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its communication behaviour depending on how projecting himself in the eyes of others. These components of self-representation indicates that in every situation of interaction the individual will behave and react according to what it thinks is and what it wants to appear. The picture of itself will intervene in the situation of the didactic communication: in his behaviour adopted towards the student, the teacher can use a certain type of language or choose a different communication channel. Also, depending on the attitude he has towards students, the teacher can shape the image they have about themselves and how they want to appear in the eyes of others. The representation of the other will determine the nature of communication relations, perhaps as much as the self-representation. The finality of the communication is largely dependent on it.

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