EVALUATION AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Abstract: The paper reviews briefly the psychosocial perspective on evaluating school results and the main types of errors associated with them, as well as the influence of attribution within this process. Also, this perspective presents the description of the relationship between social influence and attitudinal change in education.

Keywords: evaluation, social influence, attribution.

1. THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE IN EDUCATION

In a work dedicated to the psychosocial perspective on education and training, Jean-Marc Monteil underlined the importance of the psychosocial perspective in this area, stating that 'education and training involve actors, determine or are determined by interactions, have social significance, reflect social stakes and finally, involve dynamics of development and individual and collective change' (Monteil, 1997, 9-10).

Starting from this statement, it is extremely useful to cover several elements of social school psychology that customize the knowledge about attribution (in relation to the assessment of pupils) and particularities of social influence encountered in school.

2. PRACTICE AND ERORS IN EVALUATION

The stake of exploring how the assessment within school systems is carried out is an important one in the social life, in general, as the exams and diplomas play an important role in the Romanian society, with obvious consequences for the individual and social level. Getting a school assessment involves the issuing of an appreciative judgment, hence the multitude of forms practiced in education.

Research conducted in schools has gradually delineated a number of effects that influence how to assess students' written work (Monteil, 1997: 34-37):

a) The order effect: the works corrected first are subject to an overestimated evaluation 'except for the very first one which suffers the opposite effect';

b) The anchoring effect and the contrast effect, which make the same work, graded after a good or bad work, to be under- or over- evaluated;

c) The effect of assimilation: under the influence of knowing about the student's previous performance on the evaluation, the evaluator's behavior shall be modified to reduce the distance between the grade to be given and the previous grade;

d) (Negatively) evaluative distortions due to the fact that the student comes from a 'low grades' class or from a socioeconomic disadvantaged environment.

The listed effects refer to the evaluators who only had written papers in front of them. The distortions in the assessment are more complex when evaluating face-to-face and the evaluative activity in general 'is accompanied by assessments made in terms of personality traits. ' (Monteil, 1997, 37).

Specifically, starting with the increasing school performance, slightly stagnating or fluctuating (which is established legitimately as a result of school evaluations an illegitimate extrapolation is made concerning the personality traits of the student (who is either ' *trust worthy'*, '*effortless and uninvolved'* or '*does not practice'*). In other words teachers 'forget' they only need to evaluate the results for the educational subjects they teach so they assess the student as a personality, especially their character. However, - obviously - most teachers do not have real possibilities to assess a person, simply because they do not know many aspects of his/her life (which might explain school performance).

3. DISTORSIONS OF ATTRIBUTION IN EVALUATION

The trend to extrapolate school results to the personality traits of the assessed person was explained through the theory of attribution (and the errors that occur in the process) and also as an effect of implicit theories of personality:

1. The fundamental error of attribution occurs whenever the assessor chooses to ignore the influence of situational factors on school performance, preferring to attribute their development exclusively to the person concerned;

2. Motivational biases, particularly teachers' defensive attributions - the trend to consider those with school failure as being solely liable for it and ignoring other situational or school factors that could cause the failure.

3. Implicit theories of personality have been invoked as an explanation of the distortions in the assessment, particularly regarding 'the Pygmalion effect' (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1971): 'Students getting more effective performance at school, given that nothing objective allows prevision' (Chelcea and Ilut 2005, 129-130). This effect occurs due to the action in teachers of the 'Self - fulfilling prophecy' regarding the initial assessment of the intelligence level of students.

4. SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND ATTITUDINAL CHANGE IN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

Any activity within the school intends to act on the conduct of students (through attitudinal change), exerting a wide range of social influences and obtaining various effects that can be classified into the categories described by Kelman: complacency to the educator requirements; identification with the teacher (desirable), internalization of educational influences exerted in school.

The influence exerted by teachers in school is usually performed by a discursive type communication (direct, immediate and emitted by a source with significant attributes). Therefore, the most common form of influence obtained is conformism that does not actually change the attitudes of the subject, but rather his conduct during the period when the influence is applied.

Of great importance is Jean-Marc Monteil's remark referring to the difficulty of the task undertaken by educators: 'The discursive influence process is only apparently easy' it means to master certain basic elements of persuasive communication in schools (Monteil, 1997, 132 -133)

a. Attention should be given to special types of arguments used: a bilateral argument (presenting the pros and the cons) is appropriate for trained persons and an unilateral argumentation, which shows only the pros or only those contrary, proves especially effective with poorly educated people;

b. The form of the conclusion adopted at the end of persuasive communication is important: an implicit conclusion is more effective than an explicit conclusion (we stress here the importance of the sense of freedom, free choice in interpersonal exchanges);

c. All necessary precautions must be taken if case of any attempt to influence by appealing to fear. To avoid opposite effects to those intended, the message must provide the means to solve the problem and to indicate how the eventual hazard can be avoided;

d. Avoiding distractions of any kind (noise etc.) potentially disruptive of educational communication, particularly in cases where the targets of influence are of the age at which focused attention capacity is not fully present.

In the social influence exerted in the school environment, particularly relevant for the educator's action are the techniques of interpersonal influence based on obedience.

To master these techniques means to be able to implement in the school context a certain 'technology of circumstances' (Joule and Beauvois, 1997) which would allow the production of desirable social influences, starting from a content of communication that is socially validated (contents of school education).

CONCLUSIONS

In the current educational context, periodically marked by adverse developments and crises promptly reflected in the media, the psychosocial perspective on assessing and influence in education does not seem to be negligeable.

Knowing different types of distortion in evaluation (both in terms of written works and face-to-face evaluations) and explaining these distortions from the perspective of attribution theory (especially regarding their extrapolation in terms of personality traits) should exist in any teacher's 'arsenal', in addition to the psychological and pedagogical elements acquired during the initial training.

Also, obtaining the same educational effect by forms of social influence that do not involve the exercise of power (which the teacher is invested with in relation to learners) appears to be a tempting alternative given that the lack of confidence in the educational system seems to spread a lot.

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