



APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING SOCIAL PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL

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5-7 October 2012 Florina. Greece

NEW CONCEPTS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE SCHOOL

- The evolution of societies and the resulting problems require new concepts and reflections on the school
- There is an emergent need for building
 - a school capable of educating active people, rich in formation
 - a school which reinforces the sense of responsibility and makes its students conscious of perceiving problems and acting to implement changes.



THE TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

- That requires the professional training, both theoretical and practical, for the students of the faculties of education.
 - This training needs to be undertaken in relation to contemporary topics and practical situations that teachers commonly encounter in their school realities.



ARE THESE ISSUES FULLY CONSIDERED IN THE TEACHER'S TRAINING INITIAL PROGRAM?

- Such issues and problems should find a considerable space in the initial teacher training program.
- It is urgent to update training practices at universities, based on effective practices of a large number of teachers from a diverse set of schools.



WE ADVOCATE IN THIS PAPER THAT:

- Forming the educator, teacher and parent with such visions, and new competences, can be done via the assistance provided by applied social-psychology.
 - This presentation opens several perspectives, and aims at boosting and motivating, through its different issues, the power of reflection.
 - We suggest several ways of action as well as some possible solutions.



APPLIED-SOCIALPSYCHOLOGISTS BEGIN FROM THE PROBLEMS

- The aim is to contribute to the solution and improvement of problematic situations.
 - School problems can be understood and resolved based on recent socialpsychology research
 - as well as on the analysis conducted in the reality of the classroom context.



SCHOOL IS A SOURCE OF GENUINE RENEWAL

- The classroom as the basic unit of our educational system is the place where many general social-psychological phenomena take place.
 - The application of many social-psychological principles in the classroom will enable the fulfillment of educational purposes, the increase of student engagement in learning in order to make their school attitudes more positive,
 - to reduce their feeling of failure related to their negative emotions,
 - to improve the level of aspirations as well as their results etc.



EDUCATION CAN BE CONSIDERED, AT LEAST PARTLY, APPLIED SOCIAL- PSYCHOLOGY

- Our goal is to focus on a limited number of socialpsychological concepts and phenomena related to the Self, engagement, classroom climate, assessment, adaptability and non-adaptability.



THE SELF AND THE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

- Very often students tend to believe that their performance, in a wide range of tasks, is constrained by innate abilities and that they cannot change their level of intelligence.
- *Are these beliefs another important determinant of academic achievement?*



THE SELF AND THE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

- Very often the students develop a negative or positive attitude of their skills in specific academic fields, which are an integral part of their “Self” concept.
- *Is this concept influential and how?*



THE SELF AND THE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

- The students belong to different social groups and can sometimes suffer from negative stereotypes associated with these groups.
- *Are these negative stereotypes a real problem for the students?*



IN FACT,

- The students who perceive intelligence as an innate characteristic, which “people might have or not” suffer particularly from some repeated assessments of their performances.
- Each grade is perceived as an indicator of their intelligence level and causes a lot of anxiety.



ON THE CONTRARY,

- The student outlines his intelligence as an emerging potential
 - He can hope on a reward for his efforts.
 - This is, of course, true provided that the compliments given should highlight not his assessment in essence through such expressions as: “*You are a good student.*”, “*I’m proud of you.*”, or “*You’re really a good mathematician*”, but his attempts and the processes through which the student has progressed. “*You understand something more today, bravo.*”, “*This has been done better, you’ve used a good method.*” etc.



“PEDAGOGY OF ENGAGEMENT”

- Students’ biases on intelligence, not only of their own intelligence, but as a mental skill in general, play an important role on their learning and on the way they engage themselves in it.
- The social-psychologists realize that when a student accomplishes a task, he performs it on a social context, where several dynamics apply with a strong social impact.
- Equipped with convincing instruments from the social-psychology, the teachers can be more efficient and can favor a “pedagogy of engagement” which is nothing more but a propel pedagogy and one of responsibility (Toczek & Martinot 2004).



CLASSROOM CLIMATE-THE PERCEIVED QUALITY OF THE CLASS

- Classroom climate results from the combination of multiple factors – physical, material, organizational, economic, social and cultural.
- It also varies from cold and hostile to welcoming and supportive, and may change on a daily basis throughout the academic year.
- How students view themselves and how they behave and react in the context depends largely on the classroom climate.



IN A STUDY

- Several students of the secondary school were asked which of 10 different subjects from the curriculum they liked best.
- A month later they responded to a questionnaire, where they were asked to show the subject they preferred and to judge on each teacher based on a set of criteria (Huguet & Kuyper 2008).



WHAT CORRELATIONS?

- Judgments on the “expected preferences” were taken into account to reflect on the student’s previous history concerning the subjects chosen.
- It was expected that the student who liked math in the primary level would like it in the secondary as well.
 - It resulted that the correlations between expectations and preferences registered a month later were very low, rarely exceeding 0.30.
 - On the other hand, the correlations between expressed preferences and the data concerning the judgment on the teachers were very high, over 0.85.



THE RESULTS ILLUSTRATE THAT

- The characteristics of the teacher's job determine to a large extent which course is preferred.
 - In other words, a month teaching from a very good teacher (or perceived as such) can influence on all the negative experiences held in different courses.
 - Vice versa, a month teaching from a weak teacher, (or perceived as such), can influence on all the positive experiences gained from the past.
- The students rarely love or hate teachers in themselves. ***It is the climate such teachers establish which should be regarded totally or partially responsible for the classroom environment.***



INTERACTIVE PEDAGOGY

- To reduce the risk of disrupting classroom climate, the teacher should try to minimize competition.
- This can especially be done through the listing of those activities where students, given the academic position, can work together, can exchange opinions, articulate problems together and discuss on the proposals and conclusions for their best “solutions”.
 - This kind of interactive pedagogy helps students learn some of the basic social skills, such as taking into account the various conflicting views, a process that is known to play a key role in cognitive development. (Doise & Mugny 1998).



ASSESSMENT, AN IMPORTANT PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECT

- Is part of education as well as learning. Class, in particular, is the place of multiple assessments, both positive and negative.
 - A great part of these inferences come from the teacher, but they can also be self assessments based on interpersonal comparisons that students constantly make with one another.
 - Today it is clear that the social comparison contributes to students' academic achievements.



SOCIAL COMPARISON AND STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- The student's cognitive activity is influenced not only by the characteristics of the teaching material and the teacher's work at class, but also by the social conditions especially by the comparing situations where he conducts this activity.
- The social comparison serves as a springboard for the students' individual cognitive processes. Through the social comparison there is outlined the differences among students' learning values, attitudes, knowledge and abilities (Gjini 2008).



BLANTON ET AL. (1999)

- Clearly illustrate that individuals who serve as comparative targets are important in the lives of the students, and in most of the cases those who have close psychological ties (the good friends).



GJINI, F., 2008

- The comparative situations should be the object of special care for the study and application of pedagogical actions, in particular for those related to the ways of interactive organization and competition in various class circumstances.



A GREAT NUMBER OF PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE FAMILY AND SCHOOL ADAPTATION

There exist certain tendencies and attempts to analyze and explain these problems.

- One of such tendencies consists in studying their personal history and family.
- The other tendency puts emphasis on the institutions themselves, analyzing their operation, and shows that *the nonadaptation of the child to an institution may often be described as a misfit of the institution to the child.*
- Are the violence and crime an expression of a dysfunction of the social structures rather than the “shortcomings” of the individual?



RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION

- The studies conducted by Blomart & Timmermans (1999) have focused on improving the development of the children's pro-social behavior rather than on the violent performances and their causes displayed in the school environment.



‘ON EST BIEN’

- The applied program “We are well”, is intended to enhance children’s personal resources and relational competences by developing self assessment and confidence through three kinds of attempts:
 - i) learning to know oneself,
 - ii) affirming the relations with the others, and
 - iii) identifying and expressing expectations.



OTHER RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION SUGGESTS

- A synergetic development of the emotional and cognitive sources in order to enrich the “internal language” of the children.
- This language has a regulating and balancing function which allows behavior control and the development of some sources (knowledge and identification of personal and others’ emotions, the expression of the needs and a knowledge on how to negotiate, their realization through language) (Favre, 1999).



CONCLUSIONS

- Resolving and preventing social problems in the society and at school needs changes in attitudes, values, behaviours and life styles.
- Social psychology can play an important role regarding this issue.



CONCLUSIONS

- All these issues require renovation in the teachers' way of thinking and therefore training.
- Professional competency is not sufficient on its own to be a good teacher. Many more skills, especially, in relation with valid models of social awareness, behaviour and psychology are needed.
- This new vision and attention for the role of the school and the educator as a balancing player in society has important implications in the well-being of a society as a whole.



CONCLUSIONS

- *“Classroom situations can be both a source of behavior influences and a regulator of the students’ performances and social behaviors. We can reasonably consider them as action gears favoring the success of all students”.*
- The acceptance of this conclusion becomes a challenge in itself for the education stakeholders.
- Finding an efficient way to push this gear to modify such infinite educational behaviors that define the context of learning is another formidable challenge.



Thank you for
your attention!

