

PERSPECTIVES OF ATTITUDE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

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Abstract. The present article includes scientific positions concerning research of the concept of ‘attitude’ and theoretical study highlighting its definition, structural contents, and proprieties in context of constructivist approach. Any attempt in studying, researching, developing attitudes needs systematic fundamental and holistic approach and interpretation. Scientific positions are analyzed in terms of attitudes in relation to different elements of personality, the structural components of value orientation, the process of their formation and functioning. Constructivist paradigm examination concerning attitude development can give us different benefits useful for initiating new researches and elaborating alternative ways with the purpose to improve the process of attitude formation.

Key-words: attitude, constructivism, value orientation, education.

PERSPECTIVELE DEZVOLTĂRII ATITUDINII PRIN PARADIGMA CONSTRUCTIVISTĂ

Rezumat. Prezentul articol include poziții științifice privind cercetarea conceptului de „atitudine” și studiu teoretic care evidențiază definiția, conținutul structural și proprietățile acestuia în contextul abordării constructiviste. Orice încercare de a studia, de a cerceta, de a dezvolta atitudini are nevoie de o abordare și interpretare fundamentală și holistică sistematică. Sunt analizate pozițiile științifice în ceea ce privește atitudinile în relația cu diferite elemente ale personalității, componentele structurale ale orientării de valoare, procesul formării și funcționării lor. Examinarea paradigmei constructiviste cu privire la dezvoltarea atitudinii ne poate oferi diferite beneficii utile pentru inițierea de noi cercetări și elaborarea unor moduri alternative cu scopul de a îmbunătăți procesul de formare a atitudinii.

Cuvinte cheie: atitudine, constructivism, orientare de valoare, educație.

1. Introduction

Analyzing relevant scientific literature, we are convinced that attitude aspect within the personality and in general has recently been the subject of special attention of many scientists from different fields and, in particular, from a psycho-pedagogical perspective.

Various studies concerning attitude, classification of attitudes, formation of attitudes in frame of personality system, coherent promotion of pro-social attitudes within educational institutions have been carried out by R. Mucchielli, D. Vrabie, C.Cucoș, P. Popescu-Neveanu, A. Chircev etc.

Attitudes have also been studied in relation to values, behavior, norms, activity, communication, and society by I. Ajzen, M.Fishbein, D.Campbell, R.Fazio, L.Thurstone, M.Rosenberg, N.Feather, D.Byrne etc.

The problem of investigating personality’s attitudes is widely studied by scientists of pedagogy and psychology such as C.Rogers, A.Maslow, G.Allport, A.Leontiev, V.Measiscev, B.Serbanescu, N.Silistraru, V.Paslaru, V.Botnari, T.Callo and others.

Appreciating the theoretical and applicative importance of the investigations carried out, we will mention that some aspects of the problem related to educational psychology and pedagogy still remain little researched especially in contemporary conditions of society development.

The research problem derives from the contradiction between the urgent need to develop and maintain the attitudes oriented to general humanity values, conditioned by progressive changes and projections for future personality for 21st century on the one hand, and the lack of coherent and holistic theoretical and methodological fundamentals in formation of attitudes on the other hand.

2. Theoretical approaches to ‘attitude’ definition

Approaching the concept of ‘attitudes’ from a pedagogical perspective requires the examination of scientific positions in the field of psychology, with particular reference to social psychology.

We can find dissimilar scientific approaches concerning attitudes. The authors’ opinions differ regarding definitions, structures, classifications, properties, and functions of attitudes.

Attitudes cannot be examined separately from the human being and society. They are manifested through behaviors and are related to the orientations established through a continuous evaluation of situation and become a major source of our social identity.

Fleming (1967) mentions that for the first time in 1872 the concept of ‘attitude’ was used by Charles Darwin as strong motor expressions of a certain emotion [as cited in 10, p.175].

From point of view of social psychology, Gavreliuc A. [9] considers that social attitude is primary orientations that constitute selective references towards a social object (event, personality, institution) and which determine a pattern of behavior.

From psychological perspective G. Allport (1935) presented the attitude as „a mental and neural state of readiness, organized by experience, which exerts a guiding or dynamising influence on the subject's response to all objects and situations to which s/he is related” [as cited in 7, p. 227].

Therefore, attitudes are defined by Fazio & Roskos Ewoldsen (1994) as associations between social objects - virtually any aspect of the social world - and subjective evaluations of those objects [as cited in 9, p.100], most often self-orientations towards different situational frameworks the subject is directly confronted with or which are stored in memory according to Judd et al. (1991); Crano & Prislín (2006); Olson & Kendrick (2008) [as cited in 9, p.100].

Christian Fleck studied the history of the concept of attitudes. Therefore, he found that its wider using was specific to social and behavioral directions at the early twentieth century. The word ‘attitude’ originates in the medieval Latin ‘*aptitude*’, initially it was

specific to the field of arts (painting, sculpture) in order to describe a body position of a subject. The word 'attitude' is found in several languages with the same root: '*atitudine*' in Italian, '*attitude*' initially in French, then in English [10. pp. 175–177].

Fleming (1967) draws attention to another probable country of origin of the concept 'attitude' may be Germany, which until the 1920s was one of the countries where various scientific schools developed in the field of philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, sociology. In particular it is Würzburg School of Denkpsychology, which developed its own conceptual language, applying compound words, and used the notion of 'Einstellung', which meant what happened to person inside before performing an action. Later it was translated by E.B. Titchener as 'attitude' and therefore became the concept of today using [as cited in 10, p.175].

For this study the theories regarding attitudes by А.Лазурский and В. Мясищев present interest. В.Мясищев explains the attitude as a conscious, selective, experience-based psychological connection, which unites the personality with the objective reality (world, human beings), expressed in actions, reactions and affective states [12]. A person is born without any attitude, but in the process of life a system of attitudes is formed that is specific only to this person.

Thus, attitude approaching is impossible without human being and society. Attitude formation takes place in the social environment, more precisely in social groups of which the subject is a part. The values, the ideas promoted within the social environment constitute the foundation for shaping the attitudes towards the objective reality, towards one's own person, being the latest in formation within the attitude system.

3. Attitudes in relation with behaviors, believes, and values

Attitudes have been studied in relation to various structural elements of the personality: behavior, beliefs, values, motivation, etc. The importance of attitudes within the personality and social environment (especially interpersonal relationships) is argued by influencing the behavior of the subject individually or collectively. The initial use of the concept 'attitude' was frequently encountered with the prefix 'social' (social attitude) which can be found in the teachings and works of William I. Thomas. After, together with his co-author Florian Znaniecki, he explicitly positioned the attitude in a prominent environment [as cited in 10, pp.175-176]. Attitudes were studied in relation to various structural elements of the personality, researched within the social group. The importance of attitudes within the personality and social environment (especially interpersonal relationships) is argued by influencing the subject's behaviors individually or collectively. Campbell (1963) considers that social attitudes are assumed to be residues of past experience that guide future behavior [as cited in 2].

The analysis of various scientific papers allows us to see the presence of multiple theoretical positions on the definition, interpretation of the concept of attitude, its

relationship with certain structural components of personality and mental processes, individual / social manifestations in subjects / groups in different ages. But, the stringent problem for contemporary society is the determination, the elaboration of ways to form the desirable attitudes of subject within the social environment of which s/he is part, the formation of appropriate attitudes for building desired social culture and organizing surrounding world. The question would be: how should we proceed, what steps should we take to form the attitudes of the human being?

The quality of the formation of desired attitudes is closely related to the social environment. W. Thomas was equally concerned with the problem of attitude formation and reformulated it by addressing another pole of the problem and asked: what would be the way to produce the desirable type of social organization and culture. Correspondingly, W. Thomas (1927) proposed two concepts: value and attitude and suggested the following definition of the concept of attitude: “a process of individual consciousness that determines a real or possible activity of the individual in the social world” [as cited in 10, p.176]. By social value, the scientist means “any empirical informational content accessible to members of a social group and a meaning about which it is or can be an object of activity” [as cited in 10, p.176].

Analyzing these definitions, we find that they are related to each other: position and consciousness are determined depending on informational content (data, facts) and the meaning given by its subject which, therefore, dictates subsequent actions. This suggests the idea that the subject's behavior is related to attitudes and values. The complex of determined relationships takes place in the activity of the human being, which is regulated by consciousness and leads to knowledge and transformation.

Ajzen I., Fishbein M. remarks that after a lot of serious discussions, the development of standard attitude scaling techniques, and a great number empirical researches, most theorists (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 1986; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Giner-Sorolla, 1999; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) have concluded that *evaluation* is the primary component of attitudinal responses [as cited in 2].

Thurstone's (1931) well-known definition of attitude is illustrated as affect for against a psychological object [as cited in 2].

In frame of social psychology scientists have employed the terms *affect* and *evaluation* interchangeably (e.g., Chen & Bargh, 1999; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993; Rosenberg, 1956). According to Giner-Sorolla (1999); Schwarz & Clore (1983) in frame of general psychology the scholars applied the term *affect* to mood, emotion, and arousal [as cited in 2]. Just as the attitude scaling method developed by Thurstone (1928) as stated by Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto (1992) relied on evaluative rather than affective scale values to infer a person's “affect for or against a psychological object”, participants in later research were asked to label psychological

objects as “good” or “bad” [as cited in 2], to judge them for degree of liking or disliking (in a way that agrees with Murphy & Zajonc (1993) [as cited in 2]).

According to the results of the experiment conducted by R. Wyer and T. Srull (1994) focused on modeling attitudes of persons selected with polar orientations towards a specific theme, it was concluded that attitudes function as mental frames, as very influential cognitive patterns, which organize information based on inferential schemes depth correlated with a number of contexts [as cited in 9]. At the same time, it has been found that social attitudes significantly influence social thinking and the reasoning’s conclusions we build.

According to attitudes’ expansion, they can be individual, assuming a selective reporting and a particular orientation towards a social object of an individual, but also a social personality, implying a selective reporting and a specific orientation shared by a social group.

Russian psychologist A. Г. Ковалев (1957) addressed to researching the problem of relationship between will and the psychology of attitudes, and demonstrated that attitude determines the nature of volitional effort [as cited in 12].

В. Н. Мясищев (1930) Б. Г. Афаньев (1947) considers that attitudes acquiring stability, expressiveness, meaning, become characteristic for the individual, therefore, becoming character traits, but remain attitudes [as cited in 12].

Krech & Crutchfield (1948/1952); Crano & Prislin (2006); Olson & Kendrick (2008); Branscombe & Baron (2017) [as cited in 9] characterized attitudes by a few specific properties: the first one is *a remarkable resistance to change* (because it is a latent disposition of personality structure, with a relatively stable character); and the second one are *different degrees of generality*, triggering very different reactions, which tend to spread in areas larger than the particular ones in which they were activated, and at the same time *mobilize an important one social energy*. Also, attitudes presuppose the *individual responsibility*, since their manifest expression is subject to social control; they have their own relief, according to their orientation towards the universe of meanings to which they refer (being, in this way, more important or diffuse) and are strongly contextual, structuring themselves against an integrating social, cultural and historical context.

Having analysed the literature in domain of pedagogy, psychology, sociology etc. and a large number of researches and scientific positions, we can make certain conclusions and offer a personal vision regarding multi-tier attitude formation and intermediary action as a component monitoring by value. The process of initial formation of attitudes in human beings takes place under the impact of social, cultural, educational, and individual factors by internalizing values, norms, etc. interpreted by personality differently.

Regan & Fazio; Fazio (2000) understand the attitude origin by attitudes acquired through direct experience, they are much more strongly infiltrated into our inferiority and influence behaviors more consistently [as cited in 9].

Krosnick (1988), Boninger et al. (1995), Crano & Prislin (2006), Wegener (2013) consider that importance of attitude in personality system is influenced by at least three relevant factors [as cited in 9]: *self-interest*, related to how the transfer of attitude in behaviors leads to attainment. the symbolic targets of the subject (from social recognition to self-worth); *social identification*, which considers how the subject can, through the mobilization of an attitude, strengthen their attachment to the groups relevant to their own social identity; *value relevance*, estimated by the extent to which the activation of an attitude reflects the dominant values of the subject. The more self-interest, social identification and value relevance are clear, the more important the attitude is for the subject.

Socialization is the individual's effort to assimilate the behaviours of other people they can see, to be part of the group and to be accepted, fulfilling the role offered and adopted, and having the status offered. Unlike internalization, socialization is a process that goes backwards, from individual to society. By internalizing these "normal" behaviours, the individual becomes a social being, a moral being, as E. Durkheim calls it [6].

If manifested behaviours are accepted by members of the social environment of the subject, their experimentation continues and is the foundation for the development of attitudes that are also formed on the basis of experiences, affect, cognition, and knowledge accumulated from childhood and lifetime, forming parallel believes that correlate strongly with attitudes and manifested in various situations.

Ultimately, these behaviours, attitudes, beliefs lead to the formation and gradual development of values within the personality. Then they become interrelated components of value orientation. The relationship of behaviours, attitudes, beliefs is infused by the emotional sphere of personality, which is necessary and important for the constitution of the entire personality system. Shaping values from the perspective of the verticality and laterality of their contents depends on the knowledge and experience of the personality. After the value-shaping process is completed, the direction of action is reversed: the newly-formed value influences the components inside its orientation for the exteriorization of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours [4].

Therefore, the process of attitude formation is a continuous one that starts with the exteriorization of the adopted behaviours applying the cognitive, affective spheres and is initiated within the various activities, interactions that wholly involve the person. Then, it gradually leads to attitudes and beliefs shaping. The attitude formation is continuous, being influenced by various life situations and experiences which can have a radical influence on their modelling. The process of manifesting attitudes is the opposite of the

process of formation: attitudes being coordinated by personality beliefs are made in appearance through individual behaviours.

4. Attitude formation through constructivism

Constructivism represents an approach that has become increasingly frequent in the field of education sciences. Its occurrence is closely related to the need to give an answer to the behaviorism, but also to complete, a current preceding him – the cognitivism.

Constructivist perspectives are grounded in the research of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, and the philosophy of Dewey, as well as the work of Lave. There is no constructivist theory of learning, but most constructivist theories agree on two central ideas as stated by Ekpenyong, Edokpolor (2016): (1) learners are active in constructing their own knowledge, and (2) social interactions are important in this knowledge construction process [as cited in 4].

Constructivism brings information about how knowledge is constructed, mechanisms involved in understanding, learning, how the human brain works. In the practical-applicative plane, it marks essential changes, in the aspect of the methodology, of the strategy, of the working tools used, of the means used. In the 21st century, a special role from the constructivist perspective belongs to the computer, gadgets, Internet, multimedia, ICT.

Honebein (1996) describes the constructivism philosophical paradigm as an approach that asserts that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. It is based on the analogy or basis that people form or construct much of what they learn through experience (Cashman et al., 2008; Hein, 1991) [as cited in 1, p. 2].

Piaget, Dewey (2001) and others laid the foundations of a new way of thinking about the theory of knowledge. According to their position a person is not a mere passive storage of information but takes an active part in this process. The theory of evolution remarks that organisms interact with the environment they live in. According to Dewey and to Piaget (and others), human behavior is the response of an organism to changed conditions. Dewey stresses the act of transformation of conditions or environment by an individual, and claims that knowledge is the tool which serves this purpose. In the school environment, pupils (students) learn by experience which comes from their activity. They must not gain knowledge directly from a teacher as this would block their thinking remarked Dewey (2001). Similarly, Piaget considers the development of cognitive processes as the highest form of our adaptation [as cited in 3].

According to abovementioned opinion our adaptation is continuing because we experience permanently and manifest different conduits involving in it our cognitive processes that are in unlimited development during our live and by it our attitudes are in relative changing. Attitudes, unlike knowledge and capacities, are less understood and

less followed in educational actions; although they are the main acquisitions of learners. Attitudes represent significant relationships of the human being with the phenomena of the outside surrounding world and with the phenomena of his intimate universe. In psycho-pedagogical perspective, attitudes of personality incorporates his/her knowledge and capacities [5].

Thus, an essential element in the constructivist approach underlined by Joița (2002; 2004) is represented by the subjective element, which ensures person who strives for knowledge to conceive, re-conceive, interpret one and the same objective reality in an individual manner. In this context, the emphasis falls on the possibilities of the individual to issue original ideas, judgments of his own value, to interpret, comment, critically analyze a given situation, to formulate arguments and counterarguments in support of an idea, theories, to reflect on one's own cognitive path, to properly capitalize on the metacognition, etc. learning is based on the use and exploitation of the previous experience, which is reshaped in new patterns, which is reinterpreted, re-systematized, the predominant action being the mental one [as cited in 11].

The psychoeducational implications of constructivism in the educational system in order to approach the process of attitudes formation can be easily transferred in any field of activity.

Chis V. notices about existence of a continuum in the psychic development of child. The principle of continuous, systematic and structured influences in educational activity has as theoretical foundations the constructivist conception in the contemporary pedagogy. Education is not an activity of the moment or of actions and the influences in leaps and bounds. Education is a continuum, a reality and a lifelong learning. The educational influences are continuous, systematic, convergent and complementary. The immediate practical consequence of this principle is the need to ensure a close relationship between educational institutions and family and the need to ensure their jointly arranged, planned, and carried out actions [8].

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5. Conclusions of research importance and necessity

The approach of the education system from the point of view of attitudes is generated by the national and international tendency to form an autonomous personality capable of manifesting independence in opinion and action. The coherent and structured formation of attitudes through the organization and development of behavior, cognition, affective states, convictions, values of the subject involved in the educational process will ensure the progressive evolution of the personality development. Personality formation and development occurs in the social environment, depending on socio-abstract and intellectual interests, continuous reconstruction process centers on socio-cultural positions, opinions and therefore leads to their understanding. Attitude formation are of major importance in the personality system that has an impact on the quality of life in a social, economic, political, etc. contexts.

The problem of attitude formation constitutes a complex, multi-tier, and long-term process for education system and requires holistic fundamental approach to personality based on the interests of our country. Achieving the mission of education can be fulfilled by: satisfying the educational needs of the individual and society, developing the national culture; the realization of the educational ideal that consists in forming the personality with an initiative spirit, capable of self-development, open for intercultural dialogue in the context of the assumed national and universal values; ensuring the implementation of the mechanism of training and development of human capital through the formation of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values; contributing to the formation of national consciousness and identity; promoting educational objectives.

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