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Edukacja - Technika - Informatyka 4/1, 127-132

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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dozwolonego użytku.

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Social Representations of the University Teachers About Conflict Resolution with Students

High school teachers in their teaching activities often have to deal with the conflicts of different nature, which makes them to choose behavior strategies in conflict resolution with students.

A large volume of theoretical and empirical data on the behavior in the conflict and the ways of its resolution is accumulated in social psychology, pedagogical conflictology.

Many Russian as well as foreign researchers (A. Antsupov, W. Siegert, S. Erin, M.M. Kashapov, N.I. Leonov, L. Peter, A. Shipilov, V. Shuts etc.) refer conflict resolution to the elements of management.

The conceptual basis of our research are the theory of social representations by Moscovichi, social thinking by K.A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya and the ontological approach to the study of conflict and conflict behavior by N.I. Leonov. In the logic of the analyzed ideas, social perceptions of teachers about the resolution of the conflict are seen as a way of interpreting and understanding the conflict in the university, involving cognitive activity of teachers for its resolving which allows to fix the position for relation to the situation of conflict resolution.

In the study of social representations of teachers about conflict resolution at the university their inherent balance of stability and variability was taken primarily into account. As a part of the way of the world, the social representations form a dynamic system with a fairly stable structure. Today scientific concepts of social representations are the tools of cognition of variety of social phenomena. The theory of social thinking by Abulkhanova-Slavskaya [1994: 12–27] presents a personality caused by the characteristics of ideas, while the concept by Moscovichi [2007] is generalized, reflecting the social representations as a socio-psychological phenomena. Analyzing the basic ideas of social representations, it is concluded that, for the study of complex form of behavior in the conflict in social relations, it is necessary to consider the reflexive activity, interpreting facts and include them in the picture of the world of the individual with the stability of consciousness, regulating interpersonal relationships that determine behavior, that is – the social representations.

In the logic of the ontological approach to the study of conflict proposed by N.I. Leonov, views, as a way of interpreting and understanding the reality, is an

ontological reality. The images of the social reality are recorded in the social representation of a person who is in a situation of conflict; it exhibits the contradictions and includes a person. „The image is the subjective ontological reality that exists and the laws which determine the meaning of human existence in the moment. Image corresponds to the basic parameters of the ontological reality: it is always correlated with the subject, presented in the minds of people in the »collapsed« form, mediates and refracts through it external impact; is systemic, in functional terms precedes behavior, and in genetic is followed by human activity” [Leonov 2005].

The image of the conflict is one of the images in the whole system of the individual images. The structure of the conflict image – is an organized representation of the conflict situation in the system of knowledge of the subject, which is represented in the two aspects of structure and dynamic. Structural component of the image is defined by the conflict and includes a subject of himself and the other in a conflict situation and the conceptual situation. The dynamic aspect of the conflict situation is characterized by integrity – incomplete, typically-personality.

The ontological approach allows you to analyze social representations, which is a central feature of the conflict image.

The aim of the research is to identify specific social representations of the university teachers about conflict resolution with students.

A research objective is to compare the social representations of teachers at different levels of conflict.

Hypothesis of the study – social representations of conflict and non-conflict teachers about conflict resolution with students differ in characteristics such as resolution – avoidance, orientation in the resolution of the conflict with the students on their own interests and the interests of the other, which determines the variation of action in resolving the conflict.

Additional hypothesis – for conflict teachers in conflict resolution an emotional component is dominant, and for the „norm” teachers, adequate perception of any situation is typical.

Methods of research: psycho diagnostic methods: questionnaire „Mediation capacity of a manager to resolve conflicts between employees” (N. Leonov), the questionnaire „My behavior in the conflict” (C. Thomas), interpersonal diagnosis (T. Leary), Norman’s five-factor questionnaire, the methodology „The conflict resolution image of the situation in the university” (N. Leonov, I. Astrakhantceva).

Processing of the results of empirical research was carried out by basic methods of mathematical statistics: to identify the significance of differences between groups – T-Mann-Whitney test for the study of conflict resolution image of teachers – factorial, cluster analysis, and methods of construction of semantic space, statistical analysis of data was performed using SPSS 10 software, Statistica 5.0.

1. The stages of the study

The first stage of our research is the empirical evaluation of the level of conflict teachers. As a result, we divided the sample into groups of teachers with high, medium and low levels of conflict. With such a division in the group of teachers with a high level of conflict fall about 26,6% of all subjects, in the group with an average level of conflict – about 49,05%, in the group with a low level of conflict – 28,3% of the subjects.

The second stage of the study was to determine the type of cognitive teachers' grid. Under the grid we understand cognitive model of representation of categorical structures of individual consciousness.

During the analysis we identified three types of cognitive grids:

- Articulated grid – the integrity, consistency and coherence of cognitive components (2 or 3 clusters, well separated and interrelated);
- Fragmented grid – autonomy, independence and isolation of cognitive components (several clusters are not related);
- Monolithic grid – a tough rigid cognitive structure (one central cluster, the connections between the elements of which are very strong).

The third stage of the study was to compare the features of the image of conflict teachers of different levels of conflict.

2. The results of empirical research

The analysis of the interplay between the objects of image of conflict situation of non-conflict high school teachers has revealed the presence of an articulated grid. In cognitive grid of teachers are two large, substantially independent classes of objects.

The first class of objects we call „Successful resolution of the conflict”. It consists of objects: „Successful people in conflict resolution”, „I'm in a situation where avoid conflict”, „I am in a situation where conflict is resolved in my favor”, „The successful resolution of the conflict”, „I am in a situation where all or part of the interests of each are met”, „I am perfect in conflict”.

The second class consists of objects: „An ambitious student”, „The situation in which the student ignores the norms and rules of behavior”, „Aggressive student”, „My colleague”. This class of objects that reflects the creation of a kind of conflict we call „the conflict situation”.

For this group of teachers, students and the teachers, colleagues are equal in conflict situations. The teachers of this group admit that there are people who they do not understand; they have a polarization on conflict and non-conflict (as well as students and colleagues). Teachers of low level of conflict see successful resolutions of the conflict, when fully or partially are met the interests of each subject of the conflict, which is to them an ideal option. In reality, the avoidance of conflict is the most typical for them: when they avoid conflict, they are successful.

The analysis of the interplay between the objects of image of conflict situation of the average level of conflict teachers revealed a fragmented grid. This grid can be divided into two separate independent object classes.

The first class consists of the following objects: „The student’ response which I can not understand”, „An ambitious student”, „The situation in which the student ignores the rules and regulations”, „Aggressive student”. This cluster we call „negative student”.

The second class includes objects: „Successful people in conflict resolution”, „I am in a situation where all or part of the interests of each are met”, „I am in conflict”, „I am in a situation where conflict is resolved in my favour”, „Successful people in conflict resolution”, „I – ideal in conflict”. We call this class of objects „success in resolving the conflict”.

Average level conflict teachers admit the idea that their life experiences influence on the relations with students and colleagues. They see themselves as perfect, when successful, but in reality – seek to satisfy the interests of everyone. The situation for the success of this group of teachers – full or partial satisfaction of the interests of everyone.

The analysis of the interplay between the objects of image of conflict situation of the conflict teachers has revealed the presence of a monolithic grid. In this grid we have identified two clusters.

The first cluster we called „The successful resolution of the conflict”, it splits into two smaller sub-classes. The first subclass combines such objects „Successful resolution of the conflict”, „I am in a situation where all or part of the interests of each are met”, „A situation where conflict is resolved in my favour”. This class is called „When the teacher is successful in resolving the conflict”. The second class includes objects „Successful people in conflict resolution”, „I’m in a situation when I avoid conflict”, „I – ideal in conflict”. This subclass is called a „successful person in resolving the conflict”. These two sub-classes combine these objects, „I’m in a situation where a student is resisting”, „I’m in conflict”.

The second cluster includes objects „ambitious student”, „The student which response I can not understand”, „The situation in which the student ignores the rules and regulations”, „Aggressive student”.

We can say that conflict teachers initially perceive the student as an ambitious, contumacious, violent, and incomprehensible to them. When a student struggles, and for this group of teachers, this situation is constant, they are in conflict, and see its successful resolution only when all or parts of their interests are met.

Ideally, conflict teachers would like to avoid conflict, because they think that a successful person in the conflict is a man who avoids conflict. In fact, this group of teachers is constantly in conflict with students as their students are not included in the situation of the constructive conflict resolution.

The results have confirmed the putting forward hypothesis that allows to make conclusions.

1. The image of the conflict situation of non-conflict teachers is characterized in that it contains within itself all its constituent elements: self-image, a friend, environment of conflicts and the estimated ratio of the other partner. The image includes two independent elements of the situation of conflict interaction of real and ideal performance. Typical characteristic of the image is to assess the conflict situation of other people on the basis of the mechanism of causal attribution: the attribution of certain personality traits because of lack of information. Thus, from combining and moral people are expected positive impacts in resolving the conflict: they are assessed as clarifying, permitting, soothing, and routine. On the contrary, from the immoral and irresponsible people are expected negative consequences: they fall apart, frightening, confusing, unresolved, and unusual.

It is revealed that teachers of the non-conflict type manifest non-conflict type of behavior in the use of behavioral models of the conflict resolution, as a normative behavior, responsible behavior, ambivalent behavior, labile behavior, compromise, avoidance.

2. The image of the conflict situation of conflict teachers includes located in the same semantic cloud two elements: the idea of the real situation of conflict interaction and perfect representation of what characterizes these teachers as self-righteous and constant competition with the world. Typical characteristic of the conflict image of conflict teachers is to assess and then build relationships with other people on the basis of causal attribution. Individual element of the image is accordance of the ideal and the real situation in the conflict. These teachers feel excited about a situation of conflict. In this case, the man is credited with the unpleasant qualities such as chilling, amoral, falling apart, complex, irresponsible, indecisive, and unusual. On the contrary, it is nice – calming, moral, combining a simple, responsible, permitting, and normal.

It is revealed that conflict teachers manifest the conflict type of behavior that is manifested in the use of dominance, aggression, self-control, authoritarian behavior, avoidance in a conflict situation.

3. The image of the conflict of average level conflict teachers is characterized by the fact that its elements are autonomous and are not correlated with each other. The phenomenon of causal attribution can be mentioned as a typical characteristics, i.e. attribution of individual characteristics on the basis of an emotional relationship to man. Individual teachers' feature in a special way in this case is the attribution to students unattractive qualities such as passivity, indecision, addiction, guilt, despair, that is, they are evaluated as a frightening, amoral, unresolved, unpredictable, confusing, unusual, falling apart. Conversely, attractive and sympathetic person, for example, a colleague and student, cause pleasure, delight, no guilt.

It is revealed that for the teachers of the average conflict level is typical flexible type of behavior depending on the situation, which is manifested in the use of such behaviors in the resolution of the conflict, as confident behavior, appropriate behavior, responsible behavior, competition, balanced behavior, compromise, compliant behavior.

The study has shown that the problem of conflict in the educational process is relevant and requires further practical and theoretical study.

Literature

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Abstract

This article presents the results of the empirical study of social representations of high school teachers in the conflict resolution with students. It is revealed that the social representations of conflict and non-conflict teachers about conflict resolution with students differ in characteristics such as resolution – avoidance, orientation in conflict resolution with students on their own interests and the interests of the other, which determines the variability of actions in resolving the conflict.

Key words: social representations, the image of a conflict situation, the ontological approach.