

SUGGESTIVE COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATION, SUGGESTIVE IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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The effects of suggestive communication can be observed in everyday life. The best example of it is the suggestive effect of commercials. This kind of communication has been used in advertisements for a long time conveying a message which determines the attitude of the customers. It is well known that the media and the world of fashion suggest a definite message: the skinny build is the desirable one. If we think of anorexia or bulimia, it can be claimed that these negative suggestions can cause health problems. The positive and negative suggestive effects are present at school as well as in other fields. I am convinced that to raise attention to those suggestive effects which affect children is of great importance in order to strengthen the effect of education. There are some characters among teachers who make a great impact on our lives. Everything what they say catches our attention and it can be memorised and recited years later. These teachers are called suggestive personalities. The aim of my research is to produce an outline of the suggestive personality, the suggestive teacher. The concept is highlighted with the help of different methods and my intention is to give an account of the results reached so far.

Keywords: teachers, school, teaching method, communication, suggestion

Suggestive, suggestion

According to the explanatory dictionary (Bakos, 1994) the word derives from the Latin verb 'suggerere' (meaning 'influence'). Suggestion is to spark someone, have an influence on will.

In its everyday use the word appears to refer the meaning 'fascinating', 'having secret impact', 'showing secret inner power.' The expression 'suggestive' is often used to refer to qualities of a person, a performer or an actor. Lecturers and speakers are called suggestive who are able to move their audience with them, making the listeners focus on them alone, have an impact on us with reliving their feelings or messages suggested through their artistic activity towards us. 'The best composers' suggestive personality' helps them reach the members of the orchestra and are able to make their own concepts be accepted by the musicians and by the audience through them (Mészáros, 1978). The adjective 'suggestive' is also used to talk about pieces of creative art. These are writings, pieces of music or paintings that

have certain effects on us. We have also heard of a suggestive glance that is a meaningful look which touches us.

Suggestive Communication

The essence of suggestive communication is that 'it evokes an unintended reaction that represents the thought content of communication' (Weitzenhoffer, 1989:321).

The suggestive impact differs from the reinforced obedience in that – as a result of the interpersonal communication - an automated contact arises. The reaction is unintended in terms that it cannot be controlled deliberately in several cases' (Weitzenhoffer, 1949).

Suggestive messages may appear as positive or negative respectively. Suggestibility refers to the differences in responsiveness to suggestions in individuals: those willing to implement what is suggested them are called highly or strongly suggestible, while those who are not are referred as low or slightly suggestible' (Mészáros, 1978).

Suggestive Messages in the Media

Suggestive communication has been consciously used by media for decades. Deliberately or unintended, politicians like or would like to use these possibilities. The aim is influencing and convincing.

Application of suggestions is mostly present in the commercial industry. One of the negative suggestive impacts of the media is that they present too thin women as ideal. As a result, a great number of women choose slimming dieting, with adolescents among them, and there are more and more people have digestion disorders, or are diagnosed with anorexia and bulimia (Hamilton & Waller, 1993).

A study conducted by researchers from Harvard University prove, that the impact of the media is so powerful that it is able to reform century old traditions. On the Fiji Islands we find the traditional ideal woman a bit stronger with curvaceous features. Television first appeared on Fiji in 1995; and, as a result of the appearing favorites, thin body figure soon became the ideal to follow. 17 percent of girls made themselves vomit in three years in order to loose weight with an extra 69 percent starting dieting (Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog & Hamburg, 2002).

Suggestive Messages in Medicine

Application of suggestions has been spreading in the medical practice. People develop fear and fright about the unknown situation and place during a hospital stay in casualty treatment or in the period of surgery. These cases at patients contribute to fall into a modified state of consciousness; then the sensibility towards receiving suggestive messages is intensified (Varga & Diószeghy, 2001). Thus the well-prepared specialists apply positive suggestions in order to help recovery process and avoid negative ones (Varga, 1998).

We have gathered a great number of positive experiences; empiric researches prove the effectiveness of the method (Varga, 2008). It seems obvious, that suggestive techniques used widely from the commercials to curing patients, can be applied in pedagogy as well.

Suggestive Communication in Pedagogy

Using suggestive communication consciously at school seems to be reasonable since children are easily suggestible, they are sensible to emotions and have strong inclination to counterfeit (Zétényi, 2004). Suggestibility in children is very strong between about the age of day nursery up to year ten (Mészáros, 1978).

Leo Tolstoy emphasized the role of suggestions in education as early as the end of the 19th century. 'His attention was captured by the latest achievements of the medical hypnosis and suggestion and he starts to explain the impact of an adult on the child with suggestion.' According to his views, education and unconscious suggesting are the most important. Tolstoy evaluated the educational role of examples rather high. Education is an impact on heart through the hypnosis of the example (Szabó, 1987:132-133).

There are spontaneous effects at school, when the children react on suggestions spontaneously. Katalin Varga (Varga & Diószeghy, 2001:10) records a widely known case in her book about suggestions which happened at a country school. This phenomenon refers to the fact that the child turned into a modified state of consciousness because of the exaggerated emotions and so he implemented the negative suggestion unconsciously.

The Class as a Crowd

Unconscious processes and hypnotic status can be developed in a class when it turns into a crowd. These occasions children are even more responsive to suggestions (Zétényi, 2004).

School classes are defined as groups, but, according to Ágnes Zétényi (2004), it may become a crowd. This crowd phenomenon was first examined by Le Bon (1913), who claimed that the main features of an individual within the crowd are: disappearance of the conscious personality with strengthening of the unconscious personality. Emotions and thoughts emerge to move to one direction through the spiritual infection and suggestion, ending up with suggested thoughts becoming actions.

Festinger and colleagues (Festinger, Pepitone & Newcomb, 1973) turn our attention to the phenomenon of desindividuation in group situation. Then the individuals do not regard their fellow group mates as individuals. This also weakens the inner inhibition which eventually appeals to the members of the group.

The above mentioned effects may take place in a school class as well, that is the class turns into a crowd, the role of emotions becomes dominant with the weakening of the role of the intellect and hindrance. The structure of society and the normative order is destroyed in this case (Zétényi, 2004). In this status of the class the Carpenter effect appears. It is a tendency to join others in implementing others' activities together with them (Zétényi, 2004).

Becoming a crowd of a class may happen as a result of strong emotional status, one being a wave of anger or that of exhilaration. The starting point can be pantaloony, depression or panic etc. These phenomena can be avoided. Another reason may be the disintegration of the structure, which can be prevented by precise timing and planning leaving no space for doing nothing (Zétényi, 2004).

Pygmalion effect

The Pygmalion effect can be listed among the negative suggestions, when the teacher suggests what a student should be like through verbal and non-verbal signs, evaluation or other ways. This phenomenon belongs to the group of self-implementing predictions which refers to the power of changing the reality. There are a lot of expectations formed on the basis of learning about the other person, distorted by various factors. These then turn into actions and activities in the behavior of the partner, based on the suggested information.

The impact of the Pygmalion effect in the pedagogical process was described by Rosenthal and Jacobson: positive expectations were generated in some of the teachers in a school towards some students' school performance. As a result of this, the actual marks given to these children improved at the end of the academic year. The expectations referred to the students' intellectual performances, behavior and school career.

The expectations are based on the experiences about the parents' job, school background, the students' gender, their previous achievements, intelligence and motivation. The teachers' expectations affect the marks, that is, the subjective evaluation of learning, instead of the concrete test results of the students.

The expectations towards the school achievements and behavior often go along: perfect performance is rather expected from a student of excellent behavior and other way round, the latter referring mostly to girls.

The self-implementing predictions are mediated towards the students in various, generally non-conscious ways: instant confirmation, more intense eye-contact and smile, physical closeness to students who are thought to be more gifted (Cserné Ádermann, 1986).

The latest analyses detected the effects of the students' expectations on the teachers. As a result of the positive expectations towards the teachers, the non-verbal signals from students turn positive, and the teachers feel more competent and well-balanced (Feldman & Prohaska, 1985).

The Suggestive Effect of the School Environment

The Importance of the Environment

The role of the environment is essential for children. According to Piaget's adaptation theory (Piaget & Inhelder, 1999), the individual lives in a constant interaction with the environment, on one hand they adapt themselves to it, and they intend to change it on the other. These assimilation-accommodation processes are called 'adaptation'.

Piaget claims (Piaget & Inhelder, 1999) that the primary motivation for gaining information is an attempt to establish a balance in the adaptation process: during the cognitive development an intention arises for the interaction with the environment in order to make the cognitive functions operate continuously, while the new knowledge causes overbalance, then, a new structure is created in attempt to restore the balance. Research activities encourage interest, exploring and inductive learning, in which the actual understanding happens through the individual's own activity (Piaget & Inhelder, 1999). A young child outlines theories and schemes about the operations of the world, and explores their environment like a researcher. While being in a constant interaction with the world, the child gains experiences about himself, his skills and features.

The role of the quality of the environment is crucial from the point of view of the child's development. The child's activity cannot be separated from the environment as they take part in the activities that take place in the surrounding environment (Durán-Narucki, 2008). In case of infants it is noticed that motivation for exploration of the environment depends on the opportunities offered by the environment (olds quotes Cohen & Trostle, 1990). The child's environment affects the cognitive development. Greater opportunities help development. The skill for physical orientation in children has a contact with their performance in a given environment (Kumar, O'Malley & Johnston, 2008).

Evans and Stecker (2004) found that those subject to environmental stressors in acute or chronic way, have defects in implementing tasks and in learning performance. The survey also suggests that there is a correlation with the socio-economic indicators and the environmental risk factors.

There are more and more publications come out emphasizing the importance of the children's environment. Children spend the majority of their days at school. According to Heft (2001) both personal and physical environment play a significant and active role in forming behavior. The quality of the school affects learning.

Messages from the Environment

There are several types of suggestive messages. They appear not only as verbal messages, but non-verbal signals, a gesture, a notice or an image. The environment conveys suggestive messages with its continuously repeated suggestive impacts (Varga & Diószeghy, 2001).

Children are particularly sensitive to the environments in which they spend time because, as a part of their development, they actively look for cues on how to behave, who they are, or what they can accomplish. According to Prohansky and Fabian the classroom itself conveys messages in explicit and implicit ways (Cohen & Trostle, 1990).

The Negative Suggestions of the School

The school is the most important setting, after the home, in the development of children. The design and quality of the setting of schools—primary environments for children and adolescents—are particularly critical and have a direct effect on a child's self-identity, self-esteem, and academic performance (Ulrich, 2004).

The outcome of a large-scale survey conducted in New York proves that the children's performance is influenced by the school environment on various levels (Durán-Narucki, 2008).

First is the material level, in which the condition of the school building directly influences children's learning. In this level, building components in disrepair such as inadequate temperature, or the bad conditions of floors and toilets are direct obstacles to the students' academic process and achievement. On the other hand, children are sensitive to the environment, and unhealthy environment (air-pollution, damp and mildewed walls) may cause illness which directly leads to absenteeism.

A second level is that of social interaction. The daily interactions between all the users of the school are affected by the conditions of the school building. Run down buildings are not good places to work or learn and this may play a part in both the number of days students attend and the quality of the teaching process. Teachers and administrators may become frustrated

with the daily obstacles they face, which can create an unwelcoming environment. Parents may be less comfortable sending children to schools with discontent teachers and administrators.

The risk of social and emotional difficulties is even higher in children coming from poverty; this may be explained with their being subject to inadequate environmental effects (Evans & English, 2002).

Overcrowding, in terms of square footage per child in the classroom, is one factor responsible for decrements in reading scores for girls and increased behavioral problems among boys (Ulrich, 2004).

In a run down school building with graffiti on the walls and locations around where it is easy to hide, using marijuana, smoking and absenteeism is higher in upper grades. The immediate neighborhood conditions around the school can also influence student behavior. Problems in the neighborhood infiltrate into schools.

Environment possesses meaningful features (Heft, 2001) where negative suggestions affect us non-consciously. A broken toilet that is not fixed speaks of the level of concern and care of those responsible for the school facilities. The accumulated effects of battered school buildings may convey to students, parents, and teachers unworthiness and abandonment. Environmental connotations of abandonment such as in “scary” classrooms or bathrooms can be integrated into youth’s self-concept at a very important period of their personal development.

Positive Messages

The impacts of the environment were analyzed on the way round as well through measuring the effect of renovated school building and well-organized classrooms on children. Those classrooms in better physical condition provided a better opportunity for checking students’ work, and they had more place for hiding – in testing their cognitive abilities they reached higher marks than contemporaries coming from poorer conditions. (Maxwell, 2007).

Nash (1981) made comparisons in behavior of young children in a randomly arranged classroom and a well-designed one. Children participated in more activities of manipulative type, showing higher creativity and manufactured more varied things, also used more complex coloring and worked with more different tools. Those enjoying the well-designed classroom observed its condition better.

Classrooms and hallways that are decorated with the products of students’ intellectual engagements – representations of academic concepts, projects, displays, and construction – are found to promote greater participation and involvement in the learning process (Ulrich, 2004).

Killeen and colleagues (Kumar, O’Malley & Johnston, 2008) found that the act of personalizing the school classroom by posting work of school projects, artwork in semipublic and public areas generated a strong sense of identification with the school among the students. Thus, clean and attractive classrooms with permanent displays of student masterpieces and trophies convey to students.

These physical characteristics of the school, positive and negative, convey to students the values and culture of the school community.

Conclusion

Schools should be places where children feel safe, valued, and taken care of. Public school buildings embody the interest and investment that a community has in education and in the future of their children.

Schools' physical–environmental experiences reflect and create a normative social order and this order is internalized and is partially or completely accepted as the normal order of things. School environment conveys the society's norms that are internalized by children through accepting them as the normal course of life. Thus the school environment plays a crucial role in the development or hindrance of a child.

Schools are where the cultural capital of a society is transmitted. School attendance, as an enabling condition for any exchange or transmission of capital is key in the educational process that provides students with the credentials they need to improve their social situation. I feel it essential to apply suggestive communication as a method in everyday pedagogical work. The aesthetic environment with its positive meaning provides a safer and more comfortable learning environment and facilitates the effectiveness of teaching.

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