THE MANAGEMENT OF POSITIVE INTERACTIONS IN LEARNING SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT
An important role in the management of learning situations is played by the structuring of learning tasks and by the interactions between the learning groups involved in task solving. The study focuses on a theoretical approach of some explanatory models regarding knowledge development through interactions within the learning group, through cooperation and its effect on learning motivation.

KEYWORDS: cooperation, didactic competences, learning situations, positive interdependence, social interactions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of "interaction" has been sanctioned by the representatives of the School from Chicago (R.E. Park, E. W. Barges, G. H. Mead, W. I. Thomas) and involves in this vision an ego – alter relation, where the "actor" interprets (assigns significance) the other ones behaviour but also his own behaviour and based on this interpretation s/he responds to the partner's behaviour. According to G. H. Mead [1] the conscience originates in the individuals` interaction, which, through cooperation and communication creates social objects that develop an identity between individual and social consciousness. Due to this fact, communication appears as a social acknowledgement of symbols, of socially significant gestures and even of communication intentions. The effect consists of developing thinking, the human intelligence as unique form of psychosocial experience. Initial premises have been continued and theoretically and practically revaluated from different perspectives:

The Model of Social Interdependence has as representatives K. Kofka, K. Lewin, M. Deutsch, Jhonson&Jhonson, Cohen Sh. Sharan, E, Aronson and others and develops the idea that the type of structural interdependence from a situation determines the way individuals interact among themselves. Social interdependence exists when individuals share mutual goals and the results of each individual are dependent on the others` actions. M. Deutsch identifies three types of interdependence and the ways of interaction that generate them [2]:
- Positive interdependence reflects cooperation actions when individual actions promote the success of the others,

- Negative interdependence which indicates the reverse situation when one's actions block the success of the others,
- No made interdependence by whose means one's activity does not produce effects on the others neither regarding stress nor regarding failure.

The theory of social interdependence generated methodological experiences that tried to promote positive interdependence within the learning group.

Models of behaviouristic type have as representatives Skinner, Bandura, Slavin and others and are focused on the effect of encouragements/ rewards upon the functioning of the group and on promoting positive interdependence by choosing objectives of cooperative type. The focus on these objectives creates situations where the only way the group members can achieve their personal objectives is group success. The members of the group have to help their co-workers, have to encourage them and have to involve themselves with the maximum of effort so that the group becomes successful, determining the motivation of learning

Cognitive and Constructivist Models focus on mental construction and mental processing of learning. It is considered that interactions between pupils, group interactions, are valuable for the individual because s/he has to assess points of view different from their own and it protects him against forming rigid and stereotypical intellectual patterns. „ There are fulfilled the intellectual conditions of group cooperation when each member is capable of understanding the others` points of view and adjusting his own action or verbal contribution to theirs" [3].

The importance of interaction with colleagues in constructing knowledge is developed by Vâgotski through the concept *proximal area of development*, the difference between the present level of child's development and the potential level of development can be solved through problem solving, with adult guidance or in collaboration with other colleagues. The analysis of variables that influence the development of prosocial behaviour, highlights the importance of affection, emotion awareness and control in one`s adjustment to social and educational environment. The following assertions are arguments in favour of the usage of affection in school learning and in the development of prosocial behaviour:

▪ Emotions activate and direct the behaviour and support motivated behaviour. Affection can regulate the behaviour because it has the role of "action acceptor".

▪ The intensity and quality of emotional experience depends on the cognitive assessment of the situation. It is made according to a series of socio-cultural or personality factors and allows judging the experience in terms of pleasant or unpleasant, stimulating or coercive.

▪ Our feelings and emotions are a valuable source of information, being involved in making decisions with a universally human character.

▪ The defining role played by emotional encoding in learning is acknowledged by more and more researchers after the 1990s. H. Gardner (2004) „The formative role of emotions is more and more often acknowledged in learning" [4] D. Goleman (2008) „The pupils` emotional development is decisive for their success in life and not only for good school results" [5].

The complex role of affection in an individual`s adjustment to the world can be grasped by relating it to other elements or psychical processes. Thus, cognitive judgement as part of different emotional states becomes significant in the development of "Emotional Intelligence". In this respect, the evolution of theories that regard intelligence as formative structure and affection as prosocial function brought about numerous debates lately. **Emotional Intelligence can be defined as the ability** to recognise, understand and direct emotions inside ourselves and in the others. According to Goleman, it determines „our potential of acquiring practical skills based on his five elements: self-awareness and self-control, motivation, empathy and social skills. Our emotional competence proves how much of that potential have we managed to turn into real skills ready to be put into practice"[5] (2008). To compare in contrast the differences between ways of traditional learning, based on mediation and cooperative learning S. J. McCarthey and S. McMahon [6] make the following distinctions.

Tab. 1. Formative Involvement of cooperative learning

	Traditional learning situation	Learning situation through cooperation
Knowledge Development	Unidirectional / Transmission	Multidirectional / Transformation Forming consensus
Area of proximal development	The teacher helps pupils in control transfer	Fluid and Dynamic Progress
Communication	Unidirectional	Multi- and bidirectional

2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING – DIMENSIONS AND EXIGENCY

All these theories generated in the educational practice of the 20th century a ample research and scientific development of cooperative learning. These led to its application is an important way of structuring the formal and nonformal learning situations on different age levels. Cooperative learning takes place when pupils work together, either in pairs or in small groups to solve one and the same task, to explore a new subject or to create new ideas, new combinations and even authentic innovations. „Cooperative learning means using as training method of small groups of pupils/students, so as they

will be able to work together and eventually each member of the group improves his own performance and contributes to increasing the performances of the other group members" [7].

Several steps have been made from learning in groups to cooperative learning and organising the learning experience other than individually. There are some differences between learning through collaboration and cooperative learning, the most important being that in learning through collaboration the stress is laid on the learning process and in cooperative learning the process and the result are equally important. The orientation towards the product as result of the learning process brings about the development of goal oriented thinking and of the feeling of individual and collective responsibility. „Cooperative learning refers to a set of training strategies that involve cooperative pupil - pupil interaction towards the subject, as integrated part of learning process." [8] Cooperative learning develops the respect for diversity, the capacity of empathy, social abilities. The social – cognitive conflict arises given the fact that among the group members there are also cognitive differences. This conflict generates the acceleration of learning. Numerous studies prove the superiority of cooperative didactic strategies in the prejudice of competitive and individual learning. Cooperative didactic strategies develop superior cognitive processes, communication abilities, improve motivation, self esteem, develop the personality. Salvin, R. E. [9] draws on easy model of analysing the effects of cooperative structuring on learning performances. (Fig. 1.)
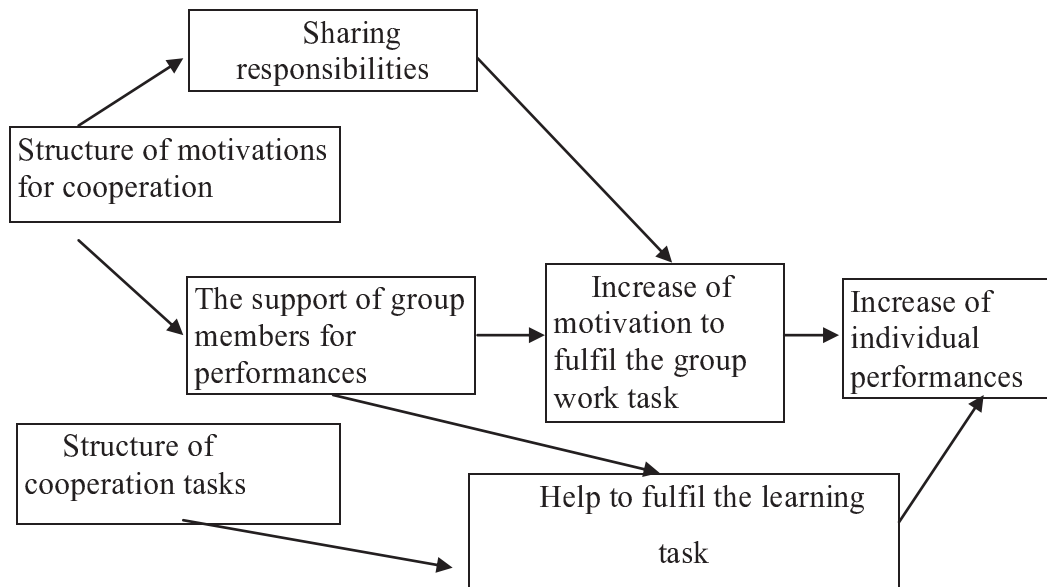

Fig. 1. The Model of the effects of cooperation on performances

Daniel Goleman allowed the expansion of the concept of Emotional Intelligence, changing the way people have regarded the role of emotions in health and welfare, in everyday life, at work and in schools. In 1995 he published a book that became a bestseller – „Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ" where he defines the concept of Emotional Intelligence. The author considers it the key to personal and professional success and also a mixture of self-control, motivation, empathy, free thinking, tact and diplomacy. These attributes make a person possess a high level of Emotional Intelligence. Thus, s/he can control emotional reactions in relationship with other persons because s/he is aware of all factors that contribute to the emergence of that particular reaction. In this definition, Goleman identified five fundamental aspects of Emotional Intelligence: *knowing one`s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself (self-motivation), recognition emotions in others (empathy), handling relationships between individuals and in the group.* In the field related literature, cooperative learning is characterised by the following elements: *positive interdependence, direct interaction, individual responsibility, interpersonal and small group abilities, group processing, pupils` roles and abilities necessary for group work.*

Positive interdependence

We may say that positive interdependence is done when the members of a team aspire to a certain mutual acknowledgement, being positively dependent on each other. Everything that is a gain for one member of the team is a gain for the whole team. Pupils realise that they need each other to fulfil the group task. The teachers can structure the positive interdependence establishing *aims, mutual objectives* ("learn and see that all members of the group learn"), *mutual rewards* (team acknowledgement on the basis of members` contribution), *mutual resources, cooperative tasks* (identifying those tasks that would motivate and direct the group), *distributed roles* (the one that resumes, the one that encourages the others, the one that formulates the answer).

Learning tasks

În the field related literature we can read about learning tasks that focus on the learning activity determining different types of group interaction [10]:

- *Task of disjunctive type* The group has to make a selection of each member's answers and contributions. The best solution is identified.
- *Task of conjunctive type.* Implies that the productivity of the group is linked to each member's efficiency, even to the weakest one.
- *Task of additional type.* The result of group's activity is the sum of each member's contribution.

- *Tasks of discretional type.* The members of the group can mix individual options in any way they want. The final solution is the result of all participants` contribution.

Direct Interaction

Pupils help each other in the learning process, encouraging themselves and sharing their ideas.

They explain the others what they know, discuss, teach one another. The teacher arranges the groups so as the pupils to sit one next to the other and discuss each aspect of the task they have to solve.

Individual responsibility

Each student's performance is frequently assessed and the result is presented to him and the group. The teacher can highlight individual responsibility choosing pupils at random for a test, or choosing one member of the group the give the answer.

Interpersonal and small group skills

Groups can not exist or function efficiently if students don't enhance certain absolutely necessary social skills. Students must develop these skills the way they are taught different things. They include conducting, decision making, confidence building, communication, conflict management. Pupils are taught, helped, monitored in using collaborative social capacities that increase the efficiency of group work.

Group processing

Groups need certain moments to discuss how well they have achieved their goals and to maintain efficient work relations among group members. Teachers provide necessary conditions for processing through tasks like: (a) enumerate at least 3 actions of group members that led to group success or (b) enumerate at least one action that could increase the group's success the next day. The teacher permanently monitors the learning and gives feedback them and the whole class about the way they work

Students` role

Within each group the roles pupils play can be oriented towards the task, the group maintenance or both. Because students have to get accustomed to both categories, the teacher sometimes distributes specific roles like the ones below. Pupils` attention is drawn on isolated roles to make them aware of each role's necessity. They have to change roles for each activity because the purpose of the activity is to make them able to perform them all simultaneously. At group's level the following roles can be assigned [11]: *the Assessor*: verifies whether everyone understands what is being worked at, *the Spy* searches for necessary information at other groups or, occasionally, at the teacher, *the Time keeper* pays attention that the group focuses on the task and respect the given amount of time, *the Active listener* repeats and reformulates what other have

said, *the Interrogator* extracts information from group members and the *Résumé* draws the conclusions so that they make sense, *the Encourager* congratulates, helps, encourages each member of the group;*the Responsible for Materials* distributes and collects the necessary material, *the Reader* reads the written materials, the Speaker presents the group's conclusions in from of the class

Didactic competences

The teacher becomes a facilitator of collaboration and cooperation among pupils in order to achieve efficient and long-lasting learning, co – participant in activities of learning organisation and fulfilment. It is necessary that he receives a certain feedback to be able to explain the success or failure of certain group activity. If the learning groups do not function properly, if conflicts arise within them, the teacher has to interfere to solve the situation, to re-establish the proper functioning of the group.

We observe that by using cooperative learning the teacher gets receives new competences [12]:

- *Energizing Competence* focuses on the teachers` ability to make students want the get involved in the activity and to train them for finding alternative solutions.
- *Empathic competence* implies the ability to transpose himself in the situations pupils find themselves in.
- *Organizational competence* represents the teacher's ability to organise the class in work groups, to maintain and enforce respecting the rules regarding cooperative learning.
- *Interrelationing competence* implies communication availability, development of necessary social abilities for proper group integration. Tolerance and opening to novelty as well as encouragement of originality will lead to similar availability from the students in their relations with the others.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Creating learning situations implies the option for ways of structuring the interdependence among pupils, because the chosen type of structure will determine the way in which pupils will interact with each other and the results they will achieve. Implementing cooperative learning in the classroom is a complex process that involves approaching an instructional philosophy based on the main scientific theories and also the usage of these methods and procedures, of specific learning techniques. The study confirm that the assumption of an emotional literacy should be taken into consideration not just at home, but especially at school. Our studies prove that children who are emotionally well trained set positive relations with children of similar age have

less behavioural problems and recover faster from a negative experience. A stimulating climate contributing to the improvement of school results. During this programme, children should be allowed to experiment games, exercises and techniques of emotion recognitions, control, self-control and emotional regulation.

Applying this model implies changing the role of involved actors, generating positive effects on cognitive, affection – emotional, metacognitive and social level.

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