

Teacher's and student's competence beliefs according to scenario theory

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Abstract: The article is connected with the problem of personal teacher's and student's competence, resp. saturation of need for competence, which reflects our desire to sense that our activity, abilities and effort are crucial for our impression that we influence our environment, for our feeling that we are respectable people. We are interested mainly in the problem of perceived control in the context of specific scenario teacher-student.

Key words: teacher's/student's competence, control, scenario.

1 Scenario of a “traditional school”

The social behavior is controlled by a complex of social roles, which create the proper “I” (Goffman, 1959). This is a view of sociological tradition about people functioning in a social context. We can accept such a form of reductionism and look at the interaction teacher-student through the perspective of scenario theory. Scenario is an interpersonal and social plan which regulates our interpersonal behavior as well as the roles (as individual operational plans) regulate our individual behavior. We can meet with the scenario in various personality theories (for example the transaction analysis) though the authors do not have to designate it this way. An advantage of the scenario is a fairly easy orientation in a social context which we usually want. However, the disadvantage is a creation without assessment and too frequent application.

In the centre of our interest there is the scenario of the the “traditional school” concept teacher-student. As many other scenarios, it is based on a priori defined bilateral evaluation of cognitive disability. How is this scenario formulated? “My teacher is foolish, but he/she thinks that I am foolish.” What does the scenario require from a teacher? He/she must be right. He/she perceives the student as a “subject” which is in the school because of learning. The student has to fail from time to time. Formal

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evaluation appears from the presumption that the majority of “subjects” in the class must get worse marks besides the best marks in the class. The scenario is thus reinforced in this way.

What is the scenario based on? M. Moldoveanu and E. Langer (2004) write about seven principles of the scenario:

1. Basic has to be learned so that it can become natural.
2. To be concerned means that we are focused on one thing only.
3. It is important to delay the need satisfaction.
4. The mechanical memorizing is unavoidable in education.
5. Forgetting is a problem.
6. If we are intelligent we have to know what happens around us.
7. Each answer can be evaluated as right or wrong.

Principles defined in this way have clear consequences for the expected behavior of a student which does not have to be concentrated on information acquisition but on making a good impression to a teacher. Students create the set-off strategies and they believe the teacher does not reveal them. Students try to fill the principles of the teacher’s scenario:

1. I do not discredit the basic assumptions of arguments because the teacher will hate me for it.
2. I pretend that I am concerned with the task. I hide my interests.
3. I pretend that I am responsible and I concerned with education.
4. I reproduce the teacher’s words exactly.
5. I use a lofty style of speech to make a good impression at teacher.
6. I pretend that I am informed. I use samples from media, work, family, etc.
7. When I am admired, I smile. When I am being lectured, I express the regret, I discredit myself and apologize.

The conclusion of such interaction is a reinforced spiral of acts which keep both parts of the system together. In the introduction to his book, E. Goffman (1959, p. 1) writes that if the man comes close to other people, they will seek for information and “will be interested his general socio-economic status, his conception of himself, his attitude towards them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc.” People seek for a lot of information about other people they are in interaction with and they consider the information relevant. E. Goffman’s (1959) description of making an impression corresponds to the competence evaluation.

2 The need for competence

We can describe the competence, or the need for competence, as a wish to perceive ourselves as capable to produce desired outcomes and to avoid undesired outcomes. The need for competence is considered for an inborn and universal part of human nature (White, 1959; DeCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975; Harter, 1978; Koester – McClelland, 1990; Connell – Wellborn, 1991) and it supports an affirmation that the human beings have the inner motivation to influence the environment. However, the thesis contains two problem parts.

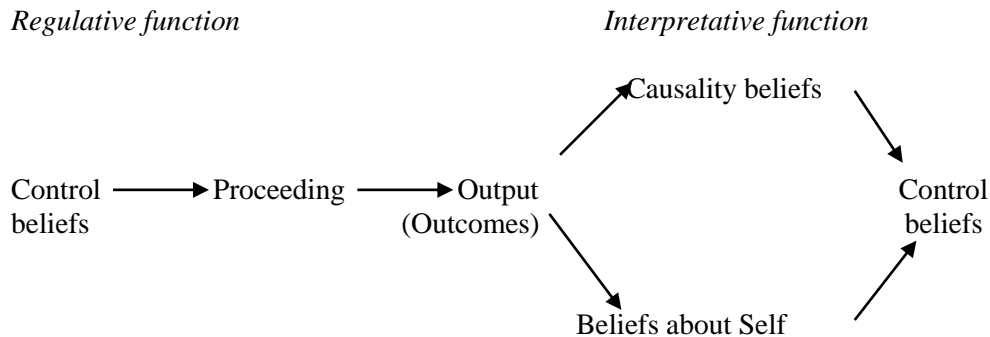
The main part is the replacement of the need for competence and the need for self-determination (or autonomy). E. A. Skinner (1995) stated that the competence pertains to the relation between the behavior and its outcomes. The statement is based on the research of R. DeCharms (1968; 1981), E. L. Deci (1975) and E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan (1985). E. A. Skinner (1995) writes that the competence is an extent to which a man can produce desired events and prevent undesired events. The opposite of the competence is helplessness. The autonomy pertains to the relation between the will and the proceeding. It is an extent to which a man can feel free to behave in the way he/she chooses. The non-autonomous behavior includes compliance and defiance which are the reactions on the others' proceeding and are not chosen willingly.

The second problem part is the question whether the need for competence is inborn or acquired. The theories of social learning do not agree with the assumption of the need for competence universality. They assume that the perceived control is a cognitive residue of reinforcement history. The theories of acquired needs assume that the needs are products of socialization. It means that the source of motivation is localized externally in these theories. E. A. Skinner (1995) argues that the growth of the need is based on socialization history and therefore the relation between the history and the size of the need is linear. But the argument of the need innateness is also discredited by individual, ontogenetic and cultural differences among people. Nevertheless, the belief in universality and innateness of the need for competence is a very optimistic theory. It emphasizes the inner motivation of behavior. But we should accept the limitations of a social context which gives a man the opportunity to be competent.

3 Control beliefs

In spite of many questions about contamination of the need for competence with autonomy and about the innateness of the need, undoubtedly everybody wants to be competent, or to control the system of competence. The system contains control beliefs which have regulative and interpretative functions. It means that the system regulates the quality of proceeding and interprets the output when the activity ends. It has a cyclic character (Figure 1) which emphasizes the dynamics of the control construct, possibility of change, situational-historical determination of the need for competence and the work with information affecting a man, or the necessity of their structuring.

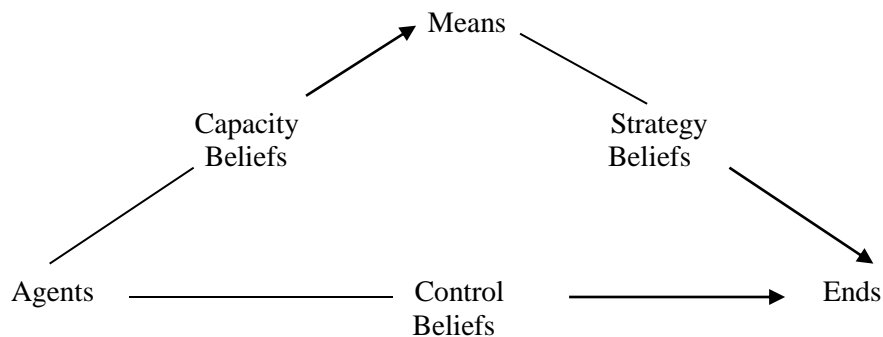
Figure 1 *System of competence*



The author of this theory is E. A. Skinner (1995). She named this construct a perceived control. Her theory issues from the theory of proceeding which considers the proceeding a central unit of behavior analysis (Boesch, 1976; Frese – Sabini, 1985). The proceeding is defined as a goal-oriented, intentional, emotionally under-painted behavior which is enacted in social context. In the course of conceptualization of the perceived control, E. A. Skinner (1995) distinguished three theoretical components of proceeding: agents, means and ends (Figure 2). It implicates three types of believes within the system of control. First, control beliefs pertain to generalized expectations about the extent in which the Self can produce desired and to prevent undesired events. Second, strategy beliefs pertain to generalized expectations about the extent in which some means or causes are adequate conditions for production of ends or outcomes. Third, capacity beliefs pertain to generalized expectations about the extent in which the Self manages or has an access to some means.

Obviously, E. A. Skinner (1995) operates with the concept “belief”. Belief marks the essence of the perceived control. It is a cognitive construction which is open to change. It pertains to future (in terms of expectations) or to past (in terms of attributions). E.A. Skinner (1995) expects that the functions of beliefs are regulation and interpretation of proceeding (as shown in Figure 1).

Figure 2 *Three types of believes*



Regulative beliefs are control beliefs (I have control, I am competent) and interpretative beliefs are capacity beliefs (I have a feature required for my success) and strategy beliefs (I can apply a feature required for my success). E. A. Skinner (1995) regards these types of beliefs as separated cognitive constructions. From the semantic perspective it is possible to regard the control beliefs as combination of capacity and strategy beliefs. Thus if anyone is able to apply effective strategy then he/she has control.

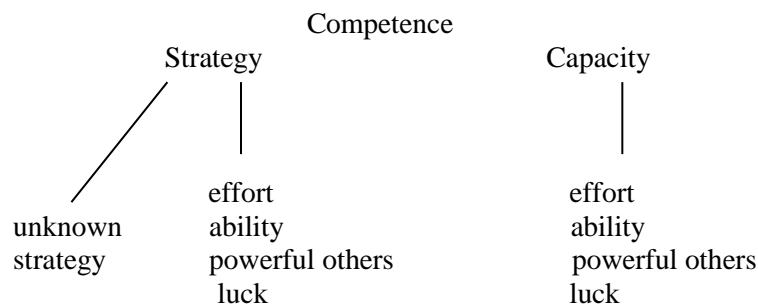
4 Control profiles

We can use information about the beliefs for the construction of control profiles. We distinguish optimal and non-optimal control profiles. First, we should complete the capacity and strategy beliefs with typical attributes according to E. A. Skinner (1995) who accepts the ideas of H. Levenson (1982) and H. M. Lefcourt (1973) (the authors of “Locus of control” theories) and works with the following attributes. The capacity beliefs include the effort, ability, powerful others and luck. Within the strategy beliefs there are the effort, ability, powerful others, luck and unknown strategy (Figure 3).

The optimal control profiles contain:

- high control beliefs (I can be successful and I can avoid a failure);
- high strategy beliefs and high capacity beliefs in an effort (effort is an effective agent and I can try);
- low strategy beliefs and high capacity beliefs in ability (ability is not crucial but I am clever);
- low strategy beliefs and high capacity beliefs in powerful others (teachers manage me but I can force them to like me);
- low strategy beliefs and high capacity beliefs in luck (luck is not the main assumption of success but I am lucky);
- low strategy beliefs in the unknown strategy (I know the causes of success and failure).

Figure 3 *Attributes of the perceived control*



Non-optimal control profiles contain:

- low control beliefs (I cannot be successful and I cannot avoid the failure);
- high strategy beliefs and low capacity beliefs in effort (effort is an effective agent and I cannot try);
- high strategy beliefs and low capacity beliefs in ability (ability is crucial but I am not clever);
- high strategy beliefs and low capacity beliefs in powerful others (teachers manage the activity in class but I cannot force them to like me);
- high strategy beliefs and low capacity beliefs in luck (luck is the main assumption of success but I am not lucky);
- high strategy beliefs in the unknown strategy (I do not know the causes of success and failure).

5 Student's control in educational environment

What are the implications of such information? Students are not free in traditional system of education because they are comfortable, non-autonomous, and they react purposely on the proceeding of the others. However, students are competent because they modify their own behavior to produce desired outcomes – success in school. Their strategy belief (when I play an expected role within the scenario teacher-student I will be successful) is enough for their subjective impression about their own competence. But this kind of saturation of the need for competence, hopefully, is not the goal.

What do we suggest as an alternative to the scenario of “traditional school”? We suggest cancelling the pessimistic impression of humans controlled by “egoistic genes” and “social engineering”. People are also confirmed in education, and in the mechanism of social reproduction (Komárik, 2001). E. Komárik (2001) says that education is not the right (student cannot decide if he/she uses it or not). It is a coercive instrument based on asymmetric relation (between an educator and an educated). Such a relation directs the young man to the constitution of interpersonal relations (in terms of the concept “paidagogia”), escorts him from unconsciousness, and directs him to culture (in terms of the concept “educatio”). E. Komárik (2001) draws the attention to the symmetrical relation which can be attained in the process of personal maturity in the contact with the ideal and common influence of the others. E. Komárik (2001) calls this process “edification”.

6 Change of the “traditional school” scenario

What does it all mean for the scenario teacher-student? Unfortunately, scenarios cannot be eliminated because they come under the cognitive structure which reflects our experience and helps us to be orientated in social situations, though it is possible to modify the scenarios. According to the assumptions of M. Moldoveanu and E. Langer (2004) we propose the modification:

1. The basis can be perceived as a condition for functioning in psychologically valued relations. They can be natural for man.
2. Concentration on one thing can be requested. But in many situations the diffusion of attention is more desirable.
3. The delay of the need satisfaction is necessary for long-term goals satisfaction. But sometimes it is possible to satisfy the needs immediately.
4. Memorizing seems to be useful sometimes. If we can apply it in natural activity, it does not function as pressure.

5. Forgetting can be a problem. Especially we cannot remember the sources we can get the information from.
6. Application of information to common life and gestalt perception is requested. But we cannot perceive everything.
7. The answers on questions can be either right or wrong. But in many situations it is possible to respond the questions by several right answers.

If we will be successful in the system application of such a new scenario, we can overcome bilateral derogative content of the scenario teacher-student: "My teacher is foolish, but he/she thinks that I am foolish." If we, as the teachers, are competent to change this scenario, students are competent too. They can also change the principles of scenario which can look like this:

1. I can have doubts about basic arguments. We will try to find the truth together with the teacher.
2. I am concentrated on my interests. I am concentrated on work.
3. I choose the activities I am involved in. I am responsible.
4. I can choose my own communication style which respects the others.
5. I do not have to make a good impression at teacher. He/she evaluates me according to my knowledge. He/she respects my personality.
6. I am informed. I try to comprehend the information systematically.
7. I enjoy when I am successful. When I am not doing right, I try to improve my performance.

Such a concept may seem too idealistic, but the ideals are our goals and we should try to bring them to life.

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