



Original Contribution

SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF PERCEPTIONS IN THE REFLECTIVE FIELD OF THE TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the social conditioning of perceptions in the reflective field of the pedagogical profession, focusing on the social factors that influence the way in which teachers make sense of their practice, professional identity and relationships. Based on the understanding that reflection is not just an individual cognitive act, but socially situated and structured, the analysis of how teachers' perceptions are shaped by the context of the educational system, cultural expectations, social background, professional socialization and institutional dynamics, is undertaken. Particular attention is paid to the interweaving of the components of the perceptual environment, which forms a complex network of influences on pedagogical orientation. By understanding conceptual-theoretical frameworks and contemporary research on pedagogical identity, it is shown that the reflective ability of the teacher is built and limited by his social position - at an intersection with intense emotional and symbolic load.

The study examines the reflexive field in which internally created images and socially constructed roles, models and representations interact. The emphasis is on socially conditioned cognitive schemes of perception and action that influence the ability for critical distance and professional autonomy. In this context, it reveals how social conditions function as a mechanism for adaptation or resistance to the dominant educational paradigm in the process of professional self-awareness and social interaction. These mechanisms are dynamic and related to the changing social environment, in which reflection is not simply a result, but a research perspective for continuous rethinking of pedagogical practice at both the individual and institutional levels.

Keywords: pedagogical reflection, perceptions, professional identity, socialization, social position.

INTRODUCTION

Career choice is considered one of the most difficult and complex tasks faced by an individual and is a process of making a decision about the future professional trajectory taking into account personal interests, attitudes and abilities along with the needs and trends in the development of the labour market. In addition, it is perceived as an indicator of self-improvement, self-awareness and autonomy.

The choice of the teaching profession occupies a special place in modern society. Pedagogy is considered as the science of the principles, methods and forms of upbringing, training and education of a person, especially in childhood

and adolescence, as a theoretical, systematic and practical discipline and at the same time as a special type of social activity aimed at transferring from older to younger generations the experience accumulated by mankind, at creating conditions for personal development and preparing the individual for the fulfilment of certain social roles in society. Thus, the functions of the educator, the teacher are associated with his role as a mediator between the social experience of previous generations and students who are about to assimilate this experience in the process of their own formation. In this regard, the professional activity of the educator acquires paramount importance.

There are many factors that influence the professional development of teachers. Such factors can be both the adaptation of the

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educator's personality to changing conditions in a comprehensive cultural-historical process of social adaptation, in which habits, customs and qualities are built, and the forms of social control that are related to the external, objective side - the social environment, in the formation of their professional appearance. As a result of secondary socialization, the individual forms knowledge about relevant social and professional behaviour aimed at building his own image in society, and adopts norms, value orientations, and role models necessary for building a professional identity. This constructed image of professionalism, created by the teachers themselves (internal perception) is compared with beliefs, judgments and stereotypes (external perceptions) from the interaction in the professional pedagogical environment. In view of this, it turns out to be of particular importance to consider the issue of determining the trajectory of the Self as an inevitable consequence of the peculiarities of social interaction. The understanding starts from the position of the reflective teacher, who tries to grasp, clarify and analyse his own perceptions. Due to the multifaceted nature of this process, the perceptions of the educator are defined as personal constructs, refracted through the prism of the social, which can provide understandings and judgments, and are based on both self-assessment and social assessment. The reflective field is seen as an analytical space in which the teacher problematizes his or her own perceptions as socially constructed.

Reflective thinking as a foundation for constructing professional identity

The social environment in which contemporary pedagogical activity takes place can be characterized as extremely dynamic. The dynamics of relationships are related to the interweaving of the personal and the social in experiences, spontaneous impulses and conscious, planned activities that are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to both the individual and the group, the community. This is the process through which, individually and with others, teachers, especially future teachers, revise, renew and expand their mission as agents of change by continuously updating the moral goals of teaching and developing the metacognitive knowledge, critical skills and social-emotional intelligence necessary during each stage of their teaching life. The perspective for the integration of the personality in the

process of professional self-determination, which can function both as a mechanism of development and as a factor of negative self-reflection, depends on its direction in the reflective field of the teacher. In this context, the formation of identity at the stage of professional training should be considered not simply through the prism of the question: "Who am I at this moment?", but as a search for the answer to the question: "Who do I want to be?". This is a conscious choice that develops throughout the teacher's professional career and is based on the psychological basis of the individual's self-realization. During general pedagogical training, the future teacher actively, persistently, and carefully considers any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends. This form of reflective thinking involves not just a series of ideas, but a sequential arrangement, in which each idea defines the next one as its own result and is based on the previous ideas (1). In this process of conscious and controlled mental actions aimed at self-knowledge — knowledge of one's own cognitive activity and personality — the logic and content of thinking are reproduced. Reflection represents a mental tracking and control over the realization of the subject's knowledge and qualities in his practical activity (2) while at the same time serving as a methodological framework that predetermines the vector of the future professional and personal development of the teacher.

In this field of reflexivity, the two extreme poles of the teacher's perceptions, which structure and make sense of his pedagogical practice, interact and modify each other a priori. These poles correspond to what can be designated, on the one hand, as personal, individual, and, on the other hand, as perception in an intergroup (social-categorical) plan.

Dewey (1) emphasizes that when a belief has significant consequences for other beliefs and for human behaviour, it becomes necessary for the individual to consciously analyse the grounds for this belief and the logical conclusions that flow from it. It is this purposeful and reasoned process that he defines as reflective thinking in its full and essential sense. "In its loosest sense, thinking signifies everything that, as we say, is "in our heads" or that "goes through our minds" (1, p. 2). Thus the problem arises of how the human mind and the

Self arise in the process of behaviour. This question is reviewed by Mead, who believes that the mind and the Self are generated entirely in a social process, and for the first time isolated the mechanism of this emergence (3).

At one end of the trajectory of thought are individual characteristics, personal relationships and concrete interpersonal dynamics, and at the other end of the continuum are perceptions in which the teacher interprets the pedagogical interaction as dominantly determined by the group affiliation of the participants. According to Mead, "both extremes are avoided by an appeal to an ongoing social process of interacting biological organisms, within which process, through the internalization of the conversation of gestures (in the form of the vocal gesture), mind and selves arise" (3, p. 13). In the spirit of J. H. Mead, the teacher forms his perceptions through the process of internalization, in which social norms and expectations are assimilated and become part of his professional identity. This conceptual line is also clearly formulated by P. Berger, who points out: "The individual, however, is not born a member of society. He is born with a predisposition towards sociality, and he becomes a member of society. In the life of every individual, therefore, there is a temporal sequence, in the course of which he is inducted into participation in the societal dialectic. The initial point of this process is internalization: the immediate apprehension or interpretation of an objective event as expressing meaning, that is, as a manifestation of another's subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful to myself" (4, p. 149). This act of perception therefore does not represent an individual creation of meaning, but the initial stage of internalization, through which the individual appropriates the social reality already objectified in the experience of others. In this context, Berger explicitly emphasizes the inseparable connection between the formation of identity and the assimilation of the social world. "Subjective appropriation of identity and subjective appropriation of the social world are merely different aspects of the same process of internalization, mediated by the same significant others" (4, p. 152).

In this sense, the analysis of the teacher's perceptions within the framework of social exchange supports the theoretical assumption that in the process of social interaction, individuals build internal models for the

perception, decisions, and actions of others, while at the same time consciously reflecting on their own reactions and strategies.

This understanding is in line with the already discussed concept of J. H. Mead, according to whom "the mind is the presence in behaviour of significant symbols. It is the ability to indicate to one's self the response (and implicated objects) that one's gesture indicates to others, and to control the response itself in these terms. The significant gesture, itself a part of a social process, internalizes and makes available to the component biologic individuals the meanings which have themselves emerged in the earlier, non-significant, stages of gestural communication" (3, p. 20). According to Mead, "the individual has then taken the social act into himself. Mind remains social; even in the inner forum so developed thought goes on by one's assuming the roles of others and controlling one's behaviour in terms of such role-taking" (3, p. 20).

This social internalization of reactions and roles shows how thinking is constructed in contact with the social environment and how the individual self develops through internalization of interactions with others. The perception of this construct directs the focus to the social construction of reality in the reflective field of student - future teachers and offers a cognitive-sociological perspective for their professional realization. In this sense, Mead emphasizes that it is self-consciousness, and not affective experiences with their motor accompanying reactions, that forms the core and primary structure of the self, which is essentially a cognitive, not an emotional phenomenon (3).

"The essence of the self, as we have said, is cognitive: it lies in the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking, or in terms of which thought or reflection proceeds. And hence the origin and foundations of the self, like those of thinking, are social" (3, p. 209).

Identifying the perceptions of students from pedagogical specialties, not as purely personal or autonomous, but as impressions and reactions created by external stimuli in the process of professional self-determination, allows for the registration of details that are in line with social expectations. The perceptions of the educator, observed in the present, are seen as causally related to events that occurred at an

earlier point in time. This correspondence is interconnected and mutually conditioning, and thus builds a socio-psychological framework for the relationship between the self-determination of the individual and the processes taking place in the group.

In this context, the awareness of one's own identity or "the development of the trajectory of the Self" within the framework of professional pedagogical training supports the formation of qualitative characteristics of the personality. "The Self" is seen as a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible: "We are what we create of ourselves". He or she develops his/her life trajectory through a connection with the past and anticipation of the future, as the reflexivity of the "Self" is comprehensive and continuous. The integrity of self-identity is based on the continuity of a coherent autobiographical narrative, and self-actualization implies a "dialogue with time". The life cycle of the individual manifests itself through a sequential change of stages, periods or episodes, as the development of the "Self" has an internal starting point - the only significant "leading thread" of the personal trajectory (5).

The role of social categorization and *habitus* in the forming of Self-image

According to social identity theory, people belong to many different social groups (based on their sexual orientation, ethnic origin, national, religious, professional identification, etc.), and this membership is internalized as part of the person's self-image. When this happens, a person strives for deriving positive self-esteem from the specific social identity (6, p. 30).

"Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality and, like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure" (4, p. 194).

In line with Ganeva's (6) understanding, who defines social categorization as the cognitive heart of processes related to social identity, it can be assumed that cognitively students from pedagogical specialties perceive themselves as belonging to a given category by accepting the

characteristics of the objects in it. During university education, belonging to a social group is part of the self-image of the individual, which is subjectively identified and assigned to a given category.

As Tajfel and Turner (7, p. 15) point out, "social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for self-reference: they create and define the individual's place in society." During the categorization process, learners are perceived not as individuals with their individual traits, but as bearers of the characteristics of the group to which they belong.

Social groups, viewed in this way, provide their members with a means of self-identification in a social context. This identification is primarily relational and comparative: it defines the individual as similar or different, as "better" or "worse" than members of other groups. It is in this strictly limited sense that we use the term "social identity," which in the present discussion encompasses those aspects of self-image that arise from the social categories to which the individual perceives himself or herself as belonging (6).

Ganeva (6) emphasizes the significant scientific contribution of Tajfel to the study of social identity, according to which social identity is formed in connection with the consciousness of belonging to a certain social group, as well as with the emotional significance and evaluative dimensions that this membership has for the individual. In the same context, Ganeva analyses the perceptual effects of social categorization processes and the cognitive aspects of prejudice in intergroup relations through the theory of social identity and its basic concepts, which in a non-reductionist way connect individual perception and evaluation, social interaction and the dynamics of intergroup processes. These observations allow, within the framework of the present analysis, social identity to be interpreted as a reflection of those dimensions of the individual's self-image that are formed on the basis of the social categories with which he self-identifies. The process of reflection creates conditions for the awareness of these cognitive and social mechanisms and supports the understanding of

the different manifestations of the Self in the process of professional self-awareness. In view of this, reflection is not a result, but a kind of research perspective.

This conceptual approach, characterizing the intergroup relations of students during their studies, takes into account both social realities and their reflection in social behaviour through the mediation of socially shared belief systems. This interconnectedness is a key aspect of the professional self-determination of the individual in the period of social categorization in the pedagogical environment, because the consequences of belief systems can likely manifest themselves in the form of united group actions - social movements aimed at creating social dynamics in the community.

Since the mid-1960s, P. Bourdieu (8) has formulated the concept of "field", with which he emphasizes the relational nature of social reality. In the early 1970s, the theory of fields was further clarified and refined. The author presents the field as a subspace within the broader social space, which is characterized by relative autonomy and a specific structure, determined by a certain configuration of the agents participating in it. Although the agents do not always interact directly, they are in objective interrelations that are predetermined by the distribution of their social resources and by the process of domination specific to each field.

Students from pedagogical specialties, grouped according to certain characteristics that define them as a relevant "class" in the educational context, carry with them not only the basic properties by which they are classified, but also a number of additional factors that often act as hidden principles of selection or exclusion. This means that the group is defined not only by visible indicators, such as educational experience, social background or gender, but also by other, indirectly affecting characteristics such as geographical distribution, cultural or social features that, although not always formally expressed, influence interactions, attitudes and social dynamics in the learning environment.

Thus, the social world of the educator can be depicted as a multidimensional space, built on the principles of differentiation and distribution, formed by the set of operating properties in the social universe under consideration - that is, properties that give it power and influence

within this space (9). In this social field there is a certain type of behaviour - which cannot be explained satisfactorily either by the rules according to which agents consciously organize their behaviour, or by terms of crude causality. It is at this intermediate level that the key concept of *habitus* appears. P. Bourdieu (10) describes *habitus* as a multi-level system of thought and behavioural patterns that an individual learns in the process of interacting with his immediate social and cultural environment. In his work *Socioanalysis* he uses the concept of *habitus* to find a "middle ground" between two ways of thinking about the social world, in which people are not simply passive reflections of social structures, but at the same time are not completely free to choose what they want. They act according to their *habitus* - deeply learned habits, attitudes and ways of perception, which are the result of their social environment, education and experience. For students - future teachers this means that their actions and decisions in the educational process are often determined by learned social and cultural attitudes, and not only by formal instructions or conscious intentions. Their pedagogical practices develop within the framework of already learned models of behaviour that influence the way they interact with others and organize their practical activity. Actions are not reduced to free choice alone, but are part of a broader, structured framework in which people act almost "automatically", without being aware of all the reasons (10). The theoretical significance of the concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu is great. *Habitus* helps to understand how people's behaviour can be directed towards certain goals without them consciously striving for them. Bourdieu explains that *habitus* creates a deep connection with the social world from which it originates and acts as a form of knowledge that does not require conscious awareness. It allows people to practically master the laws of the world and to anticipate future events without thinking of them as a specific goal (10). "The concept of *habitus* allows us to explain how the subject of a practice can be both determined and active. Since *habitus* is not mental in nature, it transcends the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious, as well as the distinction between what is the product of mere causal constraint and what is "free," in the sense that it escapes any constraint of this kind" (10, p. 235). The model thus presented allows the use of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual

apparatus to emphasize the predictive role of *habitus* in the processes of educational identification and reflexivity.

This way of “reading”, adopted in other works of Bourdieu (11), such as “Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action”, reveals the original contribution of the author both at the theoretical and empirical levels. His philosophy is concentrated in a small number of fundamental concepts - *habitus*, *field*, *capital* - and its main principle is the two-way connection between the objective structures of social fields and the embodied structures of *habitus*. The critical review of the theoretical formulations presented in the work, as well as the possibilities for their empirical development, contribute to overcoming the limitations in the understanding of the relationship between individual actions and creative practices in the professional activity of educators. In this way, it becomes possible to register real differences that distinguish both structures and dispositions (*habitus*), the principle of which should be sought not in the peculiarities of some “national character”, but in the specifics of different collective histories.

This formula, which may seem abstract and vague, indicates the first conditions for an adequate interpretation of the analysis of the relationship between social positions, dispositions (or *habitus*) and positions taken (*prises de position*), i.e. the “choices” made by social agents in the most diverse areas of practice (11).

More generally, social positions become concrete ways of occupying positions through *habitus*. In other words, differences in social space correspond to differences in the practices, attitudes, and resources of agents. To each social position corresponds a certain *habitus* (or taste), formed by the specific social conditions of existence (11). “In other words, the “particles” that move towards the “demon” carry within them, that is, in their *habitus*, the law of their direction and their movement, the principle of their “vocation” which directs them toward a specific school, university, or discipline” (11, p. 25).

In this sense, the concept of *habitus* can function as an analytical support in attempts to encompass the different dimensions of individuality. It opens up possibilities for further exploration of social reality and for the

prospective development of theoretical tools subject to empirical testing.

CONCLUSIONS

The concepts examined allow us to move beyond a purely synchronic understanding of the interrelationships established between the social or academic characteristics of different groups in university education. The professional development of the educator does not depend solely on the strength of external constraints, but also on the coherence of his internal structures, on the ability to select and rethink experience, to correct irrational tendencies and cognitive biases, and to build sustainable, critically oriented habits of thinking.

The teacher's reflection not only protects against the intrusive erroneous tendencies of his own mind - such as haste, presumption and preference for personal interest at the expense of objective evidence - but also overcomes accumulated and self-sustaining preconceptions. It is here that the social conditioning of perception manifests itself - not as a passive registration of the situation or event, but as an active process of selection, screening, discovery and derivation of significant elements until a conclusion is reached. Perceptions direct attention to those aspects of reality that are perceived as carriers of meaning or confirmation of prior expectations. Pedagogical understanding is not limited to the registration of individual facts, situations or behaviour, but is aimed at revealing their meaning by including them in a broader social and educational framework. The educator does not perceive educational reality as a series of isolated events, but interprets it as part of a comprehensive process in which the individual acquires meaning only in relation to the larger whole. It is through this interpretative activity that the teacher makes sense of educational situations and gives them pedagogical meaning. Every pedagogical judgment is the result of a previously acquired meaning, without which reflection would be impossible. With the advancement of professional experience and the expansion of pedagogical knowledge, students - future teachers become increasingly aware of the limits of their own understanding, in which established practices of thinking, until recently taken for granted and self-evident, turn out to be socially and culturally conditioned. It is precisely this awareness that is part of the

presented chain of “self-processes” - which does not function linearly, but manifests itself as a dynamic and interdependent system.

Tracing this chain creates a methodological opportunity for a deeper understanding of the processes through which pedagogical perceptions, decisions and practices are formed. In this sense, professional pedagogical training is not limited to knowledge and experience, but takes into account the individual dispositions and potential of the educator in the direction of conscious, socially responsible reflexivity.

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