The Influence of Communication Style on the Reactivity to Social Changes at Mental Deficiencies Preadolescents

Roxana Urea*

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, 90 Panduri Street, District 5 Bucharest, P.O. 050663, Romania

Abstract

It is well known that each of us has a unique style of communication that facilitates the process of social adaptation. In time, the communication style will become a personality’s feature. Taking in consideration the main features of mental deficiency’s personality, this paper tried to reveal the influence that the social communication style has on the way the pupils with mental deficiencies react to social changes.

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1. Theoretical background

It is well know that what defines us as humans is the ability to communicate. This ability is essential for changing information, for acquiring knowledge, skills, for establishing personal relationships.

In time, as the experience in communication is grown, each person will develop a unique style of communication, who will define that person especially in area of level of social communication performances (Albu, 2008).

The communication style represents the ensemble of characteristics a person possesses, and it all is reflected in the communicative act. By style we mean: specific ways of receiving / decoding the message; personal qualities in processing / interpreting messages; specific ways of expressing the response, and personal particularities of feedback. It is fundamentally determined by three elements: 1. the person’s attitudinal process as a constant report to others and themselves, 2. models of learned communication tools: assertive, non-assertive, aggressive (with its passive-aggressive variant), and manipulative, 3. temperamental constitution as

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +040-728-087836; fax: +04031-425.34.46.
E-mail address: roxanaurea@yahoo.com
type of nerve cell reactivity. There are four communication styles: a) the **Non-assertive style** is characterized by the tendency to hide, or to run away, rather than face people. It can manifest itself through: excessive kindness and conciliation, the tendency to postpone the decision-making process, handing over to another people the right to decide, and a morbid fear of being judged by others, as intense anger is felt at the prospect of a possible failure - individuals prefer avoidance and obedience to others’ decisions; b) **The aggressive style** is characterized by the tendency to always be present; by the tendency to have the last word, to win at any cost, even if it causes damage or grief to others; c) **The manipulative style** is characterized by the preference for a backstage role, by the tendency to wait until the opportune moment has come to light, and to shine then, and by tendency to look for any hidden intentions behind others’ statements; d) **The assertive style** is characterized by: the ability of self-assertion, an honest and direct approach in personal speech; the abilities of providing straightforward opinions without aggression and without harm to others, pursuing their interests without violating others’ needs. (Urea, 2012)

Each communication style will reflect the personality features. These characteristics will be reflected in specific behavioural patterns as responses to environmental changes. These specific behavioural patterns as responses to environmental changes are known as ‘the reactivity to changes’ (Chelcea, 2003)

There are three type of reactivity to changes: a) the **traditionalist type** is characterized by the constant disturb of the environmental changes, by constant design of precise rules which give security and burden his life; b) the **libertine type** is characterized by the need of changing the environment by short term relationships, by constant searching for personal independency; c) the **realist type** is characterized by the acceptance of the environmental changes, even they are painful; by justifying of the environmental changes in relation to the content of those; by considering the process of adaptation as a mark of environmental changes.

Starting with 2004, there were performed a series of studies focus on characteristics of reactivity to environmental changes at normal preadolescents and at preadolescents with mental deficiencies (Urea, 2010)

### 2. Research investigation

The experts from special education have revealed the principal characteristics of personality at person with mental deficiency: specific heterocronie, genetic viscosity, pathological inertia, rigidity, fragility of verbal conduct, fragility of personality. These characteristics put the finger on all the personality’s traits and all the behavioural manifestation at persons with mental deficiency, even the educational influences shape the intensity of those influences. The situation has raised the following question: how the, at mental deficiencies preadolescents, communication style as a feature of personality influences their reactivity to environmental changes?

To answer this question, we performed psychological research aiming at revealing, at pupils with mental deficiencies, the influence the communication style on the way they react to environmental changes; the wider goal was to thus design special strategies that will determine at pupils with mental deficiencies better school performance, will reduce their failure in social environment.

In our research we had two major objectives: investigation, of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s communication style; investigation of the preadolescent’s type of reactivity to environmental changes. We started from the following hypothesis: *taking into consideration the mental deficiencies personality’s features, we assume that we will find different, at preadolescents with mental deficiencies, specific influences of communication style upon the way they react to environment changes.*

Our research had an initial testing procedure on 15 preadolescents with mental deficiencies and the Cronbach Alpha index (α=.627) obtained allowed us to proceed to an extended psychological research that had three stages: a) investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s communication style; b) investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s reactivity to environmental changes.
We performed our research on 120 subjects, with ages ranging between 12 and 14 years old, 48 boys and 72 girls from Special School no.5 and from Special School no. 3 - Bucharest with I.Q between 50- 70- medium level of mental handicap. The schools were selected because: a) each provides educational services to 3,500 families whose children have learning disabilities and to 1100 families that have children with mental disabilities; b) both schools have enrolled over 200 students with moderate and severe mental deficiency (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The structure of investigated mental disabilities subjects

In our research we have used the following psychological methods: The Questionnaire SC (Analysis of Communication Style) - built by S. Marcus, a Romanian psychologist with important contributions, especially studying the empathic phenomenon, and adapted, by R. Urea in 2009 for Romanian preadolescents with mental disability (fidelity index: .684), The Reactivity to Environmental Changes Questionnaire, developed in 2004 by R. Urea for Romanian preadolescents with mental disability (fidelity index: .736).

2.1. Investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s communication style.

Using a specific psychological questionnaire, we revealed the dominant type of social communication style in each mental disable preadolescent. The information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The mental deficiencies preadolescent’s communication style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of subjects</th>
<th>Types of communication style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>24.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that the dominant type among our mental deficiencies preadolescent’s is the assertive one. It appears that these subjects are able of an honest and direct approach in personal speech, of providing straightforward opinions without aggression and without harm to others, of pursuing their interests without violating others’ needs. In reality, it is a specific assertive communication style to mental deficiency person, because they have the abilities of pursuing their immediate needs without awareness the consequences. It also means, that this specific assertive communication style doesn’t allow suitable relationships based on objective criteria of knowing Alter’s features (the criteria that are used are more often subjective, empiric, and not operational to all social context).
We also have notice that the manipulative communication style and the aggressive communication style have nearby percentage. This is the reflection of manifest or latent aggressiveness of mental deficiencies personality.

We can say, that at investigated mental disability preadolescents, the communication style reflects the process of fulfilling immediate needs, a low level of aspiration that is limited most of the time for acquiring material bonus.

2.2. Investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s reactivity to environmental changes

We used “The Reactivity to Environmental Changes Questionnaire” for investigate the type of reactivity to environmental changes. This instrument focuses on revealing the following types of reactivity to environmental changes: self- safety: security requiring type, the insecure type, the realistic type. The data collected are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The types of mental deficiencies preadolescent’s reactivity to environmental changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Subjects</th>
<th>Dominant types of reactivity to environmental changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditionalist type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We noticed that the dominant type of reactivity to environmental changes among our investigated subjects is the realistic type. It appears that these subjects accept of the environmental changes, even they are painful; justify the environmental changes in relation to the content of those; consider the process of adaptation as a mark of environmental changes. In reality, these subjects don’t asses in a proper manner the environmental changes, therefore they used for adapting to environmental changes the easiest behavioural patterns, most of them are stereotype and don’t imply a high level of personal effort. This is in fact process known as “inertia of the making decisions”; his intensity of manifestation depends on the level of mental disability, on the time that they were involved in the therapeutic process.

The statistical analyses revealed, at our investigated subjects, significant direct correlation between the type of communication style and the reactivity to environmental changes: a) between mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the assertive type and the realistic type of reactivity to environmental (r = .756, p = 0.01); b) between mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the non-assertive type and the traditionalist type of reactivity to environmental (r = .683, p = 0.05); c) between mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the manipulative type and the libertine type of reactivity to environmental (r = .625, p = 0.01).

The statistical analyses also allowed us to compute the kurtosis index (.817) which revealed that the features we found are relevant for our investigated subjects as a group.

We can say that at our investigated mental deficiencies preadolescents, the reactivity to environmental changes is mark by the fragility of personality, operates with subjective criteria and is revealed by the stereotype answers with low adaptative value.

3. Conclusions

From starting, in our research we wanted to reveal, at mental deficiencies preadolescents, the role of the communication style upon the reactivity to environmental changes.
The research was focus on revealing the influence of mental deficiencies preadolescents communication style on the way preadolescents manifest their reactivity to environmental changes, because most of the time the behavioural patterns used by these subjects are not suitable for current situation.

We used in our investigation adapted psychological tests for mental deficiencies Romanian preadolescents. Based on the statistical analyses, we found that the Cronbach Alpha index has the value .815. This value is a sign of the high reliability of the psychological instruments that were used in our research.

The data collected by us allow us to establish the following typology regarding the investigated phenomena:

a) **Type A** is represented by mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the **assertive type** and the manifest **realistic type of reactivity to environmental changes**.

b) **Type B** is represented by mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the **non-assertive type** and manifest the **traditionalist type of reactivity to environmental changes**;

c) **Type C** is represented by mental deficiencies preadolescents who have as a communication style the **manipulative type** and manifest the **libertine type of reactivity to environmental changes**.

Based on such typology revealed by our investigated subjects, we can develop two types of special programs: one type will concern the implementation of different efficient communication techniques in social field; the other type of programs will address preadolescents for developing differential behavioural patterns as responses to changes in different contexts that will allow these pupils to integrate himself in different social group.

**References**


