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Dr. Bettina Turi-Ostheim, Salesianergasse 3/4/1, A-1030 Wien. E-mail: journal@gestalttheory.net

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PERCEIVED WORLD AND REPRESENTED WORLD. TOOLS FOR THE COMMUNICATION TRAINING WORKSHOP

Morena Muzi & Anna Arfelli Galli

Introduction

This project offers a consideration regarding the teaching methodology adopted in the Communication Training Workshop course in the first year of study at the Educational Faculty. The Workshop aims to train students to reflect about the intuitive knowledge they use when they describe photos projected in the classroom. This exercise focuses on the interdependence of the processes that in usual practice we describe as observing, describing and interpreting.

The theory states that the communicative skill of care workers and teachers is fundamental in establishing a relationship of mutual respect which does not intrude on other people's personal sphere with arbitrary and prescriptive interpretations. It is therefore of crucial importance to be able to reflect on intuitive knowledge, to develop an awareness of its hypothetical nature and to perfect the language used to express experiences and opinions (Metzger 1954).

For training in this field the concepts used are taken from Metzger's theory about ingenuous realism and critical realism, and from Petöfi's theory concerning minimal representation of the communicative situation: a) the performative-modal proposition (the aim of the communicative action); b) the world-constituting proposition (or the cognitive means of access to what is narrated); c) the descriptive proposition (the narrated content) (Petöfi 1980, 1981, 1982; Zuzckowski 1995; Nicolini 2000).

Teaching Procedure

In the 2006-2007 academic year there were 165 compulsory attendance students. Following a brief introduction and discussion about minimal representation of communicative situations (Petöfi 1981), about the concepts of ingenuous and critical realism (Metzger 1954; Galli 1988, 1991), students were asked to:

- give definitions of observing, interpreting and describing;
- describe some photographs which were projected in the classroom.

Then, using the theoretical practices described above, students were guided through comments made in previous years (Arfelli-Galli & Muzi 2006). This teaching method reveals the immediacy of the mental process and how much interpretation exists in words and expressions that are apparently simple descriptions. Different opinions are compared and everyone tends to develop arguments to sustain them in two-by-two exchanges.

These exercises seek to encourage an evaluation of descriptions/interpretations within a probable/improbable range, thus abandoning a true/false polarity (ingenuous realism); they also seek to develop the use of linguistic instruments that enable a pervasive attitude of critical realism.

In the final test, students were asked to define ingenuous and critical realism, world-constituting and cognitive proposition and the description of a photograph.

The Objectives

The planned objectives with the students are:

1. To begin to construct a passage from ingenuous realism to critical realism, and thus establish an awareness that a cognition of events, whether psychological or not, occurs through one's own life experience (Metzger 1954, Italian translation 1971, Galli).
2. To initiate a differentiation between perceived world and represented world.
3. To distinguish what is observed from what is interpreted.
4. To acquire an ability for the appropriate use of world-creating propositions or cognitive propositions in order to communicate specific content using different methods, such as information from written texts, spoken information and direct observations.

a) Objectives Attained

Subjects in the sample had a variety of educational levels and objectives. Students' written work was placed in the "objectives attained" category if their final definitions included the following:

1) Ingenuous realism and critical realism are considered by the students as different ways of dealing with the content of their own consciousness;
2) Observing, interpreting and describing are considered interdependent processes which are not clearly separable;
3) In the narration of their own living experience both the personal factors and the general factors are present ;

If we find in the description of the photo:
1) The differentiated and appropriate use of the world-constituting proposition;
2) The distinction between perceived world and represented world.

Example A

Definition of ingenuous realism: the psychology of everyday life defines the action of seeing as a faithful and passive reproduction of the reality that surrounds us, differentiating the terms 'objective' from 'subjective'. This type of perceptive model is called ingenuous realism.

Definition of critical realism: according to neuroscience and scientific psychology the action of seeing is an active and silent process of the cerebral system, made up of general factors (highlighted by Gestalt psychology) and individual factors (experience and culture etc. of every observer). This perceptive model is called critical realism.

Definition of world-constituting proposition: the proposition specifies the way in which things that have been said or written were present in the mind of the

communicator while he/she speaks or writes. The world-constituting proposition can be produced in explicit form (I see, I think, I note) and in implicit form (perhaps, probably, etc.).

Description of initial and final photos:

1) The sailor in the foreground is working in the stern of the boat. He is untying black ropes probably in order to moor the boat in the nearby port. A village can be seen clearly not far away. The sea is calm, it's a summery day. The sailor is wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt and a blue cap to protect himself from the sun
2) If I had to explain this picture I would say: there are four toys (a white pushchair, a red plough, a tricycle and a child's toy car) in the foreground, all jumbled up in a pile. A child probably jumbled them up as a game. They look like old toys that are showing signs of their age. Nothing else gives us more information about the setting. We can only see grass and pebbles on the ground. It may be in the country. It is definitely a sunny day.

Example B

Definition of ingenuous realism: simply a way of relating to what we see by creating a correspondence between phenomenological and physical reality. In other words, the ingenuous realist believes he has direct knowledge of physical reality as it is and in order to describe it he uses natural and spontaneous language which, however, proves to be particularly ambiguous.

Definition of critical realism: unlike ingenuous realism this is a way of relating to what we see in the knowledge that we can only know reality indirectly, ie. how it appears on the basis of the particular functioning of our system of perception. The critical realist knows that what he sees is always different from what the other person sees, because individual is unique and possesses his own experience and emotions and is conditioned by a specific cultural context.

Definition of world-constituting proposition: so called because it refers to the subject's particular inner world, in that he is concerned about specifying how the things that have been said or written were present in the mind of the communicator.

Description of initial and final photos:

1) I see pieces of wood in a heap. There are chains hanging down from one of the pieces and they are holding up a black wheel which probably belongs to a car. Quite frankly, I can't understand why this tyre has been hung up, but the overall picture does not transmit anything positive to me. The chains, however, suggest the idea of constriction. The tyre is chained up and it can only swing because the chains prevent it from moving more freely.
2) In this picture, I can see some children's toys: a tricycle, a dolls pushchair, a child's toy car and a wheelbarrow. These toys are in a country lane and I think that whoever left them there did not look after them very well: the toy car is missing a wheel, and all the objects are chained up together and thrown there as if nobody will use them anymore. The picture on the one hand reminds me of my childhood because I also had a dolls pushchair like the one in the picture, but on the other

hand the picture does not transmit positive feelings to me, because it makes me realise that my childhood is finished. I therefore feel nostalgia for that period of my life, which was dominated by carefree happiness and a desire to play.

Example C

Definition of ingenuous realism: ingenuous realism is a belief that what we see it is a passive and faithful recording of the reality that surrounds us. What comes from outside is objective and what comes from the person's thought is subjective. In reality this is not correct, since what we observe is the result of a cognitive process that begins with a simple perceptive act [....].

Definition of critical realism: critical realism is a belief that what we see is the result of an interpretative process that sees the interrelation of general factors that are specific to the object/perceived event and of the factors that are particular to the perceiving subject [...].

Definition of world-constituting proposition: *the world-constituting proposition* explains the way in which the describer has access to the things he describes, and this explains the cognitive process of the observer-interpreter and can have an explicit or implicit form [...].

Description of initial and final photos:

1) In this picture I recognize in the foreground a swing in an open place that with a little imagination could be a play-park for children. Looking more closely we can be notice that the swing is moving because it is tilted towards the right. In my opinion this swing is bit strange because the seat is made of a tyre.
2) The first thing that I can see in the picture is a tricycle with three wheels [...] and three other objects, that are very clear, are placed on it. They all look old and the tricycle appears to me to be rusty. I think that the last object is an old collapsed pushchair. With a little imagination, I would say that this strange combination of objects was put together by a child, but I probably think this because the small tricycle reminds me of my childhood. In fact I used to have a tricycle which I used to play with in the courtyard of our house. From my own experience, I can guess that the tricycle belongs to a child of three, four or perhaps five years, but this is only a personal supposition. I can just see some grass and some gravel and a wall in the background [...].

b) Partially Attained Objectives

We placed the students' project work in the category ` partially attained objectives' if the final definitions contained any of the following:

1. Ingenuous realism and critical realism are not clearly considered as different ways of dealing with the content of their own consciousness;
2. Observing, interpreting and describing are not considered interdependent processes which are not separable;
3. In the narration of their own living experience only the personal factors are present, whilst general factors are not taken into consideration;

If we find in the description of the photo:
1. The use of a differentiated and appropriate world-constituting proposition;
2. The distinction between perceived world and represented world.

The definitions of ingenuous realism, critical realism and world-constituting proposition are partially positive because there is ambiguity between the personal and generals factors in the description of the second photo. It is not clear at what point ingenuous realism is abandoned and when critical realism begins to be used. Thus, it would appear that there is a lack of comprehension regarding both the role of general factors in the perceptive organisation of what is observed, and the role of general factors in the organisation of thought processes.

Example D

Definition of ingenuous realism: according to ingenuous realism 'subjective' means the inner world of the author of the work while 'objective' simply means the relationship with what is external, i.e. what the person really sees.

Definition of critical realism: according to critical realism however, when we observe we involve our inner world, our experience of life, even when we observe external things, and therefore it is not a simple distinction like in ingenuous realism. But it also places attention on the person's interiority that can emerge while the description is being made.

Definition of world-constituting proposition: the author of the project work (...) explains if what has written refers to the perceived world or to the represented world.

Description of initial and final photos:

1) I see a log supported on two crossed sticks. On the tip of the log a hook is hung to which four chains are attached. At the bottom of the chains there is a car tyre. It looks like a swing for children. This device is set in a green environment, a garden overcast with a grey sky and in the distant there is a light mist. In the corner I can just see a village overlooking the sea.
2) In the centre of the picture, I can see, at first sight, a children's game but looking more closely I can see four jumbled objects. From the left I can see a pushchair, a long pole, a children's wheelbarrow, a little blue car and finally a tricycle. These objects are on a path with grass and stones. Behind I can make out a piece of brick wall which I suppose belongs to a house[...].

Example E

Definition of ingenuous realism: ingenuous realism is an incorrect way of describing a reality.

Definition of critical realism: critical realism means an appropriate way to describe a fragment of the world. Firstly, the observer does not allow himself to be influenced by his own personal experiences or emotions and he does not give his own interpretations of reality. He is in a position to distinguish the perceived world, i.e. the fragment of world that perceives, from the represented world, that is the result of his thoughts, memories, states of mind, feelings, etc.

Definition of world-constituting proposition: the world-constituting proposition, the performative-modal proposition (purpose) and the descriptive proposition belong to the Petöfi theory. By world-constituting proposition we mean what the observer feels at the moment he is describing the fragment of world [...].

Description of initial and final photos:

1) In the foreground I can see a person in uniform. He is wearing a blue shirt, blue trousers and a blue hat. This man is standing, leaning slightly forward, and he is holding a rope which is partially tied to the boat he is in. I can only see a small part of the boat, a red and white side, while most of the photo shows blue sea. The sea is calm and pale sunlight is shining on it. In the distance there is a landscape of trees and mountains. The sky is pale grey, nearly colourless.
2) In this photo I see an open space made up of grass sections and of white gravel. In the centre there are some toys laid in a confused and messy way. The toys are: a red tricycle with a black saddle [...]. This is not a tidy group of toys, but a confused pile of toys. This picture reminds me of a fragment of my inner world linked with my infancy, when I used the same toys as in the photo to have fun with my friends.

c) Objectives not Attained

We placed the students' project work in the category 'objects not attained' if the final definitions contained any of the following:

1. there is no difference between ingenuous realism and critical realism;
2. or there is an inversion of the two ways in which the students consider the content their own consciousness;
3. there is no difference between what is observed and what is interpreted;

If we find the following in the description of the photo:

1. The use of the world-constituting proposition is not differentiated and appropriate.

Example F

Definition of ingenuous realism: ingenuous realism is one type of passive and faithful description of reality. This is taken into consideration by common sense psychology. We find ingenuous realism in the perceptive process, which does not allow specific analysis of a picture and uses words such as: 'perhaps', 'could be'.

Definition of critical realism: critical realism is another type of description, but in this case there is a process of active and silent products. This realism belongs to neuroscience and scientific psychology. Here, alongside general and common factors (highlighted by Gestalt psychology) it includes others that are individual. We find critical realism in the interpretative process with detailed analysis of pictures.

Definition of world-constituting proposition: the world-constituting proposition tells us how the subject carried out the description. The verbs and the particular expressions of the world-constituting proposition can be divided into two groups: perceptions and thoughts.

Description of initial and final photos:

1) In the picture I can see a policeman standing above a boat pulling a rope; the boat is mainly white and the policeman has a short sleeved uniform and he also appears to have a gun. The sea is blue/grey and quite calm. To me, the lack of bright colours suggests a lifeless, sad and gloomy image. I see the gun that the policeman has is on his waist and perhaps this is something that disturbs me.
2) The projected figure at first sight provokes sadness, melancholy and a sense of abandonment. It represents a construction made up of five old toys for children, the objects are on a yellow/green lawn that looks dry and ruined. On the left we can see a little wall made of white bricks and between the patio and the wall there is grass growing. Looking at the picture from the right this group of objects seems to create an oblique line that gives sense of the infinite. It is not a beautiful picture as it seems to show city outskirts.

Conclusions

The results obtained enable us to show that in a limited part of the sample:

1. There is awareness of the role of both general factors and personal factors in the organization of what is observed
2. The use of the world-constituting proposition is differentiated and appropriate.
3. There is a distinction in life experience between perceived world and represented world.

While in a more conspicuous part of the sample the attained objectives are only partial and therefore only contain:

1. The awareness of the role that personal factors have in the organization of what is observed.
2. The use of the world-constituting proposition is differentiated and appropriate
3. The distinction in the living experience between perceived world and represented world.

In this part of the sample the entry into critical realism is soon replaced by a return to ingenuous realism. It could seem strange that such simple material, as proposed here, can involve young adults in a lively and spontaneous debate.

However, it is easy to accept that, in order to reflect on human events, the realistic/unrealistic polarity is more suitable than true/false; theoretically this is easy, but in practice it involves replacing ingenuous trust in one's own intuitions with a model that is less reassuring as it is purely hypothetical. This is a problem that continues to prevail in the educational professions.

Summary

The aim of the Communication Training Workshop is to train students to reflect about the intuitive knowledge they use when they describe a photo projected in the classroom. This exercise focuses on the interdependence of the processes that we usually describe as observing, describing and interpreting. For training in this field, the concepts are: 1) perceived world and represented world; 2) Petöfi's minimal proposition of the text which includes a) performative-modal sentence b) world-constituting proposition c) descriptive proposition that is the content narrated to you.

Keywords: Interdependence of the processes, perceived world, represented world, performative-modal proposition, world –constituting proposition, descriptive proposition.

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des Kommunikations-Training-Workshops ist, die Studenten zu trainieren, über ihr intuitives Wissen, das sie bei der Beschreibung eines im Klassenzimmer projezierten Fotos verwenden, zu reflektieren. Die Übung setzt den Akzent auf die Wechselbeziehung zwischen denjenigen Prozessen, die wir üblicherweise als Beobachten, Beschreiben und Interpretieren bezeichnen. Für Übungen in diesem Bereich gibt es folgende Konzepte: 1) wahrgenommene Welt und abgebildete Welt; 2) Petöfi's Minimalaussage des Textes, welche a) den performativ-modalen Satz, b) die die Welt bestimmende Aussage und c) die den erzählten Inhalt beschreibende Aussage umfasst.

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Addresses of the Authors:
Morena Muzi
Department of Educational Sciences, University of Macerata
P.le L. Bertelli
62100 Macerata, Italy.
E-Mail: m.muzi@unimc.it

Anna Arfelli Galli
Department of Educational Sciences, University of Macerata
P.le L. Bertelli
62100 Macerata, Italy.
E-Mail: arfelli@unimc.it