The Methodological Value of Cultural Communication in the Process of Social Diagnosis

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Abstract

Social diagnosis is an instrument underlying social intervention. Considering that the actions on the collectives are not done in isolation of the theoretical and practical issues they raise, methodological tools that allow the recognition of problems, their evaluation and the indication of clues of action should be found. Among these tools, we point out the communicative process. It is he who puts common problems in the focus of discussion, generates moments of consciousness, suppresses alienation, promotes discussion and facilitates dialectical return of problems. Thus, the practice of participatory research enriches the Social Worker and the citizen interested in being implicated and co-responsible in the task of transforming reality. Moreover, and taking into principle the various worlds of culture (popular culture, migrant culture, culture in transition, the culture of the elderly, among others), it is necessary to train the Social Worker for openness, understanding and translation of different cognitive maps.

Keywords: cultural communication, sociology, social work, methodology, social diagnosis

1. Introduction

This article aims to discuss the importance of communication in the social diagnosis process. To this end, it suggests a set of techniques selected by the authors that have been tested with students at a university, based on theoretical references that cross the spectrum of anthropology and sociology, in concrete terms, an indicate a useful scientific practice for social work . It is concluded that the techniques, tested in a first phase and suggested for the execution of practical work of students (internships, group work, professional practices) are an asset in deepening the knowledge of social reality.

According to Ander-Egg «due to the influence of sociology [and other social sciences], the term social came to be used in two senses: a generic and broad one, referring to global society [and the collective characteristics of a given population] (…); and a restricted one, alluding to particular issues of sociological analysis, such as social structure, social change, stratification, mobility and social participation» (Ander-Egg, 1995, pp. 152-153). That is, the individual measured *as* and *in* society. The understanding of the concept of communication gains visibility in Social Work, using techniques and strategies, such as social and cognitive empathy to understand the different "social sectors" (Ander-Egg, 1995, pp. 152-153): education, housing, health, social security, culture, politics, employment.

The article begins by pointing out its main objectives; then, it points out the chosen methodological and theoretical approach, centered on the observation of social interaction; then, he makes a reference to the techniques and proposes some lines for the construction of a script; concludes, stressing the importance of building moments of interaction useful for the observation of social reality.

2. Objectives

This article is based on communication as a process of sharing and socialization (Cazeneuve, 1976, p. 68), inferring the multicultural reality faced by Social Workers in their professional practice. Using the Taylor canon, part of a sense of culture where the dynamics of transmission and contact pontificate. Proceeding in this way, it sustains the methodological component of the comparative method, the cornerstone to invoke cultural diversity and relativity, the ethical component, founded on the centrality of human rights, and the communicational paradigm, which allows the cross-reading of referents common to the human species and its apprehension capacity and feasibility. Embracing these assumptions, it pairs transmitters and receivers in the manifestation and requirement of the validity of the different cultural parameters, in the exposure of their cognitive maps and in the concrete practice of democracy and civility.

Finally, summoning social diagnosis as a key tool for intervention, it suggests a grouping of investigation techniques that privilege communication and launch some hypotheses for the organization of subjects, their management and their validity for the investigation process.

3. Methodology

This article starts an exploratory research supported by the documentary consultation of reference works and converges to the suggestion of research tools in the diagnosis phase, examining some of the most significant trends in the field of communication and social theory.

The sample consists of a group of students formed to test the technical proposals that we present.

The diagnosis cannot be disconnected from the research phase (Desahies, 1997; Jupp, 2006; Quivy, 1992). As such, the research techniques we propose are linked to models, which are the strategies to obtain the desired information (Sampieiri, Collado, & Lucio, 2003, p. 154), with experimental characteristics, as they manipulate a set of predefined variables and supported by readings, even though they are disconnected from internal or external validity control issues. The idea behind experimental models is identical to that of the scientific method, as it places theoretical hypotheses in objective contexts that encourage interaction and, to this extent, bring out its circular inductive-deductive matrix.

3.1. The social diagnosis and its dimensions

The analysis of the situation implies the collection of the maximum information about the elements related to the presented problem situation (social diagnosis). In this sense, it is up to the Social Worker to collect data that allow a thorough knowledge of the client's socioeconomic, family, housing situation and the global context where he is inserted. In addition, the Social Worker must know the existing institutions and social bodies (for example, partner networks), the legislation and the social policies available, and this also involves having knowledge of their own institution. This analysis requires the Social Worker to master knowledge of various types of knowledge such as Sociology, Psychology and Law, in order to better interpret the data collected and contextualize the problem.

According to the classic work of Mary Richmond (quoted in Silva, 2006, p. 9), the diagnosis seeks to provide «a judgment as accurate as possible of the situation, of the personality of a human being who has any social need (...) an attempt to arrive at the definition, as accurate as possible, of a social situation or the personality of the client». The diagnosis focuses on both subjective (self) and objective (other) aspects, and when it is done, it must be taken into account that it is never completed and that it starts when a first contact with the user is established, where pay attention to pre-notions, stereotypes, first impressions.

The social diagnosis has the following dimensions: the hypothetical dimension, insofar as it is seen as a set of hypotheses that are verified or not during the case monitoring; the descriptive dimension, insofar as it seeks to describe human behavior, in its multidimensional character, equating causes and effects, through successive contacts, participations, interviews, home visits, accompaniments, assistance; the political dimension, as it is an important aid for decision-making, insofar as it includes diverse information, comprising a multiplicity of perspectives to approach the problem and the solution; the communicational dimension, since it is an interactive and dynamic process between Social Worker and client and / or family, acquaintances, friends, neighbors, companions; it is an etiological process, insofar as it seeks to decipher the causes of the problems; it is a dialectical process, because information is

collected, which will later be analyzed in the light of theories from the social and human sciences, in order to arrive at an understanding of the true nature of the problem social situation. It is the ambivalence between truth and reason that leads us to an objective reading of the social problem and its future reorientation.

3.2. Interaction as an object of interest

The communicative process motivates enormous interest in the fields of sociology and anthropology. More or less explored as an object, it finds a guideline aimed at understanding social interaction in the works of George Herbert Mead (1863/1931). The author sought to understand the processing of subjectivity and consciousness in micro-social contexts, inspired by his teaching work at the University of Chicago and by the work The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, the first empirical study with theoretical framework realized at the beginning of the 20th century.

This search for the micro social gave rise to an identical reflection to Charles Cooley (1864/1929), interested in the analysis of the processes of production of consciousness in the original social contexts and understanding of the reasons that underlie the behavior. Likewise, Herbert Blumer (1900/1987), responsible for creating the concept of symbolic interactionism, postulated that actors are better understood in their communicative context. Thus, it addressed the processes that endow the behaviors with meanings and that lead to the constitution of the act, reiterating that the actors are a significant part in the social construction, and raised an opposition to the structural functionalism, which defended that the behaviors are impositions of a macrostructure

George Herbert Mead is influenced by three main lines: first, by the Weberian postulates that wished to determine the end of collectivist notions in sociology, by the concern with the personal construction of meanings and by the use of a subjectivist and individualistic methodology capable of perceiving actions individual and the mental processes that originate them; a second influence is that of Georg Simmel, and resides in the search for forms and types of individuals that come into interaction, having as a key idea the notion that society is an intricate of relationships between individuals in constant interaction and the structures are the its crystallized example; finally, it is influenced by phenomenology as a method of analyzing consciousness inherited from Husserl. The latter, as a doctrine, seeks essences, subjectivity and the "I" as a pole of consciousness, determining that phenomena are real insofar as they are understood by consciousness. In turn, conscience is intentionality, objective and meaning, just as it is irreducible to psychic phenomena to the detriment of phenomena experienced in groups. It was concluded that social interaction is reciprocity, an essential condition for exchange. To communicate is to overcome the transcendent experiences of the other.

3.3. The use of the body in communication

At the time that Gregory Bateson abandoned anthropology to dedicate himself to psychiatry, the hypothesis that the genesis of schizophrenia was related to the instability of the communicative system called into question the dominant idea of the Freudian unconscious, to the detriment of the social system that the concepts of "double bind" and "retroaction" accentuated. Likewise, it favored the entry of social sciences in this field, developed a

sociological perspective of understanding mental pathologies, as well as opened up clues to authors like Birdwhistell. This anthropologist, influenced by the theoretical and methodological approach of linguistic studies, which stood out in Sapir and Saussure and served as his personal inspiration, claims an anthropology of gesture, induced by the works of Margaret Mead in Bali.

The central assumption in this author's theory is that body movement, or kinetic movement, manifests itself as a form of learned communication, standardized within a culture and that can

be understood as an ordered system of isolated elements. Learning, or "gaining cultural standard" in his words, results from socialization and is incorporated into the communicational system under a paralinguistic version and another paracinesis version.

In fact, Saussure separated language, the set of linguistic rules that allow communication between people, from speech, made up of their individual acts, distinguishing social acts from individual acts. At the same time, he opposed diachrony to synchrony, placing emphasis on this second notion in the sense of observing the moment. Birdwhistell's analytics sought to crystallize the actions and approach them in operative sequences, in order to thoroughly understand the fundamentals of the interaction, examined at the level of the individual muscular dispositions, such was the demand for detail, as well as striving to translate the observations produced to an intelligible plane, borrowing from natural history the interpretive foundations for analyzing the body that goes into communication.

Heir to the Chicago School, the author has become accustomed to paying attention to aspects related to individual learning of peculiar communication systems in particular societies, abstracting the information obtained by indirect observation, transforming it into forms, since informants «are windows of culture (…) and not objective interpreters of the communicational system» (Birdwhistell, 1970, p. 191). The different chapters of his referential work Kinesics and Context illustrate this thesis, as is the case with the study of the smile, examined in its contextual diversity and distinctly comprises the social act and the biological basis, that is, the context and the foundation.

3.4. Understanding the context about the expression of one's own

We inherited from Harold Garfinkel (1917/2011) the obligation to perceive social structures as "normal environments", unfolded in the analysis of common sense knowledge, in the observation of the set of practices and in the interpretation of the considerations through which the members of a society justify their actions. On the one hand, we perceive typifications or normalizations as characteristics of common sense; on the other, we consider the organization of daily life as an object of study.

The influence of Schutz (Schutz, 1932) on Garfinkel is verified at the moment when the primacy of routine, of the thoughtless, of the relationship of the member with the group is chosen, in order to apprehend the practices that produce small and large structures scale, to perceive the contingencies defined as normal, as well as to understand the tasks that create institutions and maintain order, which are perceptible in the reports, conversations and speeches under examination. These forms of communication reveal the stable and orderly properties of the interaction and require transcription according to local terms for interpreting practices. Refusing the issuing of moral judgments, it is essential to proceed to detailed descriptions of the objects.

The foundations of Garfinkel's theory center on the nature of intersubjectivity and advocate all its importance in the social construction of knowledge, asking a central question: how do individuals recognize, produce and reproduce their social structures and actions? It becomes necessary, once again, to analyze the circumstances of production of actions and intersubjectivity, as well as it becomes clear that this methodology registers a strong empirical load when devoting itself to the analysis of the linguistic field, a fundamental resource used in social action , requiring the exhaustive collection of data as it seems fundamental to attach

importance to details in understanding the whole. The facet of manipulating information shared in a communicative exchange system gives importance to a methodology that seeks to understand the cultural foundations of that exchange system. To resort to "ethno" is to understand, in terms of interactions, its fundamentals.

Here, he assumes the legacy of Schutz, who considered that there was reciprocity of perspectives in the processes of social interaction, mutuality in the intelligibility of daily activities, which are achieved and maintained, that the actors know each other the tasks they are carrying out and that the meanings are present as a joint social construction. Thus, the properties of the action determine that the actor not only responds to the perceived knowledge but also to the normality of that behavior, that the action tends to be conducted towards normality and that the norms are resources for maintaining the intelligibility of a field of action. In short, the theory of action stems from the persistence of normative expectations.

4. Results

In this chapter, we will associate the social diagnosis, the methodological basis of previous investigation, with any concrete action on reality, with a set of techniques devoted to the production of evidence necessary for action. They are the dramatic techniques, such as psychodrama and sociodrama, the task-debate, which aggregates tools of the focused interview, the focus group and the encounter groups, the group interview and the cultural maieutics. They all have their process, their particular technique and their theoretical justification. However, the results are similar: the knowledge obtained from the communicative process.

4.1. The techniques

We have been working with our students to develop the techniques that we suggest in this article. First, we started the simulation, testing and control of variables in the classroom, the best pedagogical workshop to push the theory to the limit; second, conceiving a technical-methodological body that students manipulate and test in objective situations of data collection inserted in the phase of social diagnosis, we encourage application in the context of intervention or curricular internships, using contact and body mobility with the objective of raising problems in dynamic circumstances of interaction.

4.1.1. Dramatic techniques: psychodrama and sociodrama

Dramatic techniques are a valuable resource in social diagnosis. Using the group as an object of study, they focus on measuring the processes of interaction by observing the exercise of social roles. The theoretical and methodological orientation that underlies these techniques takes into account axiological aspects (the values), chronological aspects (the duration of the

interaction), and ethical aspects (the production of awareness and recognition), using the contributions of theater and expression dramatic way to collect data on a given subject.

Psychodrama and sociodrama are psychotherapeutic forms idealized by Levi Moreno (Levy Moreno, 1984), inspired by improvised theater and initially conceived as a group technique or «deep group psychotherapy», capable of application in various contexts and age groups. With the ideological support of social transformation in a political context of enormous circumspection, which was the rise of European fascism and global war animosity, the technique proposed to solve the problems arising from social interactions, focusing on human

groups, encouraging the dissemination of individual and collective dilemmas in an interactive and performative context, seeking to remove any focus of uneasiness produced by mistakes, difficulties or fears, among others.

In sociodrama the group is the protagonist and in psychodrama the focus is shifted to the individual. However, the verbal method is always present in the exploration of the context. Investigate and discover the ability to find new and more functional conduct options, as well as rehearse, learn or prepare to employ the most convenient behaviors or responses. This measure aims to achieve spontaneity, body action, encounter, dramatic catharsis, supported by the technique.

4.1.2 The task debate

In this diagnostic tool, we bring together the contributions of the focused interview, the focus group and the encounter groups. Ferreira (Ferreira, 2004, p. 102) says about the focused interview, which aims to conceive «new ideas and hypotheses, and not produce conclusive results about behavior patterns [fulfilling] an experimental study function » about the impact of a stimulus introduced in the conversation. Inspired by Merton (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956), who was interested in the communicative process and in the discursive interaction between individuals with shared references, the technique values free and undirected expression, the retrospective analysis of exploration in depth and of vast breadth to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to speak.

This principle is verified in encounter groups (Rogers, 2009), where individuals seek and require participation in the collective through the development of processes that generate empathy. The expression of problems, the focus on relevant issues and their exploration must produce objective consequences, so the task-debate should bring all these elements together in an emancipatory perspective of those who become aware of reality and call on the group to help resolve it.

4.1.3. The group interview

The group interview is based on the unstructured interview technique. It does not dispense with a directive orientation, although it starts from a set of questions that it intends to see dealt with in its course, employs open and exploratory questions, gives opportunity for individuals to change the order of the process and demonstrate understanding and interest in the contents and how are approached and answered. In this context, depth, the core value of the response, the capture of non-verbal language are sought.

The way to control the problems arising from social interaction in dyads is by creating comfort in issuing opinions, gaining insight into the context, avoiding undesirable responses and splitting functional informality into a process of contact and trust.

4.1.4. Cultural maieutics

We recognize in Plato's *Teeteto* lines of research of great vivacity, using the tools we propose to use: the combination of the senses with intelligence, the formulation of questions and the understanding of the causes. Through Plato's pen (Plato, 2000) says Socrates, regarding rational explanations, that «everyone is able to do, more or less quickly: expose their way of thinking

about whatever it is, unless they treat someone deaf and dumb from birth», placing the communication paradigm at the center of concern.

To this notion of maieutics, or the art of giving birth to knowledge, we associate the word culture measured under the classical meaning of Tylor. Thus, cultural maieutics would be the art of promoting debate on issues related to the material and immaterial dimension of cultures, a subject that requires specialized intervention by individuals qualified to mediate, read and reread the contents of communication and the contexts in which they are produced.

The training of specialists must take into account the following aspects. First, master the semiology of communication, understanding the relationship between meaning and signifier, the difference between syntagmatic or linguistic context relations and paradigmatic or linguistic structure relations; secondly, to understand the notions of infrastructure and superstructure in order to bring out in the communicative process the recognition of the real conditions of existence of the individuals and the ideological matrix that justifies it; thirdly, be equipped with knowledge, information, with a theoretical basis, to guide the group in solving tasks.

4.1.5. The questions

Once these techniques are pointed out, it is important to understand the typology of subjects subject to treatment. Thus, we intend to provide a guide about them, not forgetting that we are at the stage of diagnosis and that it intends to identify and assess the nature of the problem, understand the context of the individual and the group, analyze their background and past and present experiences, and understand the relationship between causes and effects.

Not forgetting that the diagnosis should ask questions, there are variables that must be mentioned. Going beyond the obvious statement of the beginning of the intervention process (contacts, signaling, among others), as well as the identification of the individual, the questions to be asked must be aligned according to the following dimensions:

a) Individual dimension - direct attention to the life history of individuals or groups and their sentimental aspects (attachment, disgust or avoidance), conduct aspects, aspects of attributing meaning and personal relevance to biographical events, exploring moments of trauma or crisis;

b) Social dimension - directing attention to the socio-economic and cultural situation, measuring the real and idealized social status, understanding the dynamics of interaction between members of the belonging groups, making cultural patterns, values and aspirations aware;

Considering the specificity of the situation, the diagnosis can specify the following subjects:

a) Work - direct attention to qualification, professional situation, career progression, type of employment contract, union membership, adaptation to work tasks, social protection regime, study the individual's training and health capacity;

b) Housing - direct attention to the type of housing, property and use regime, degree of healthiness, type of domestic equipment, aspects of domestic economy, architectural barriers;

c) Education - direct attention to the level of education, attended schools, study habits, cultural routines;

d) Associative life and leisure - direct attention to the degree of participation in associations, use of free time and leisure activities;

Imagining a situation linked to deviant behavior, the questions to ask may be the following:

a) Dependencies - identification of consumption addictive psychoactive substances, their history, quantities consumed and frequency of consumption;
b) Social institutions - presence or relationship with therapeutic communities, street teams, withdrawal units, social reintegration actions;
c) Judicial Problems - identification of arrests, trials, suspended sentence, effective imprisonment, motive);
d) Constitution and Family Relationship (evolution of the family, type of relationship: good, bad, satisfactory, null);
e) Financial support (Social Action, Unemployment benefit, Retirement / Pension, none…) or economic data (benefits received, type of aid requested and received, family assistance, type of aid, food, real estate, means with which you can count) and means it has).
f) Medical Assistance (Beneficiary number, Health system, Health Center, Family Physician ...);
g) Health status (diseases that you suffer and that you suffered, current health status, consumption of medicines, treatments, evolution, medical history, drug consumption ...) or clinical data (Relevant Physical / Infectious / Infectious / Psychiatric Diseases, Diagnosis, Age, evaluation of the last 6 months ...);

Considering situations in which more than one problem arises, we proceed according to Garcia's proposals (García, 2008)

a) establish a hierarchy of requests-needs;
b) systematize and reorder the collected material;
c) determine the most important aspects regarding the identified problem situations;
d) analyze influential factors;
e) delimit the causes and their effects, as well as possible solutions;
f) delimit the different lines of action;

5. Conclusions

The understanding of cultural communication, in a process of social diagnosis, is crucial to outline a common project of social intervention, allowing us to understand, through the techniques described by us, the «theories of the client's world» (Payne, 2006, pp. 6-7), that is, the concrete problems of life in society (poverty, domestic violence, social exclusion, unemployment, school failure, bulliyng, aging, among other social phenomena and realities) and that promote knowledge for Social Work.

Communication theories and their distinct areas are presented with the purpose of reducing incomprehension in the face of cultural diversity, promoting dialogue, empathy and negotiation between the subjects of intervention and Social Worker.

The social diagnosis is, therefore, the profession's identity instrument, with Social Work constituted by a theoretical and methodological hybrid body that uses the contributions of the

social and human sciences to make a diagnosis through the understanding of the client's world. That is, the understanding of the context over their own expression, privileging interaction as an object of interest, in order to gather data to promote social change.

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