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CASE STUDY – AN INTERPRETIVE EXERCISE

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Abstract

This paper presents the theoretical and reflexive practical on case study in term of complex cognition. The purpose is to clarify the meaning of case study as a result of collected data and to analyse the identity of delimited Romanian principles. The qualitative research is a case study into a case study because it is about a multidimensional perspective: case study as an approach, as a method, and as a tool. The research is part of a longitudinal study conducted in Romania during the 2009 – 2015 period. The findings illustrate moral mechanisms, curriculum culture, professional commitment, models, preferences, experiences, practices, skills, strategies, innovative solutions, scientific alternatives, required competencies, school’s culture, -and so on, involved within case study. To conclude, case studies are implicitly linked to Romanian school life and it is not possible to use an algorithm to solve this case study because it is not possible to anticipate the interrelationships between school, environment and curriculum.

Keywords: case study, educational psychology, qualitative analysis, communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The case study is becoming one of the most used ways to investigate reality in various fields. Despite the fact that guidelines are outdated, the investigations are stratified (Trif, 2015): psychology, education, medicine, neuroscience, therapy, sport, mathematics, anthropology, and so on, stir different wordings over this topic. The methodology of research presents a probabilistic picture of the investigation through the case study because of the different explanations promoted (Trif, 2014): psychology research methodology, educational research methodology, social research methodology, etc. The meta-analysis (Taylor, 2013) of the theories on case study show that the characteristics of the issue are divergent.

This paper intends to combine theoretical explanations on case study with empirical data collected from a part of a longitudinal investigation by case study in Romania. The purpose is to examine the exercise of exploring the educational and psychological face of the curriculum through case study.

From the vantage point of methodology research is complex (Trif, 2014) because the case study is an approach, a method, a tool, an event, an image of the phenomenon, a special context, a metaphor, and so on. The article connects the multifaceted dimensions of the case study demonstrating that it takes into account the multiliteracy’ vulnerabilities (Trif, 2015). In order to adopt the review of different methodologies of the research, the investigation escalates the conflicts between the divergent of the research paradigms, but it is necessary to advertise that it is difficult to insert this approach in one epistemology. The target population (students from the University of Bucharest and teachers) analyses cases convergent with Romanian educational system.

The qualitative research is a case study into a case study because it is about a trichotomic perspective: a case study is an approach, a method, and a tool (story). There is no doubt about the complexity of the investigation. This paper is part of a longitudinal study conducted in Romania during the 2009 – 2015 period. About 2000 students from the University of Bucharest and teachers from five Romanian regions recognize, describe, analyse, and interpret various cases related to Romanian educational system. Taking into account that the research is qualitative the objectives are as follows:

a) to clarify the meaning of case study as a result of data collected;

b) to analyse the identity of the delineated Romanian principles.

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2. FINDINGS

The qualitative analysis of data collected evidence the various perspectives of rhetoric: stereotypes about education, misinformation, poor relationship at school, the effects of learning, prejudices, and so on. In fact, the word case was not used from the first phase of the investigation; each situation to be described by the target population requires a comparison of the event with story having features of case study.

a) Most of the subjects tell a story and the greatest part of the narratives cover this meaning of the case study. From the huge number of rhetorics the following quoted texts sustain this assumption:

"In this case it is about two young pupils in the school yard before the beginning of classes. The incident occurred apparently after a heated discussion between them on a social network website. According to one of the protagonists, a colleague took drugs before the incident. The dispute resulted in serious injuries as a drug user who had on his rosette which hit his opponent in the face. The two were separated by the teachers. In the end, they had their conduct grade reduced with two point."

Sometimes the case is like a story covering a wide range of issues: contemporary, symbolic, practical, metaphorical, simple or unclear problems, etc. This heuristic exercise on the narratives reveals various ways of expressing the meanings of the story: evocative versus conversational style, reflexive versus practical question to debate, hypothetical versus ironic perspectives on curriculum. The syllogisms of telling include the scientific factors in a pluralist way. For example, the narrative analysis of the case study as a story proves that the cognition – meta-cognition dichotomization is assumed by the target population. The selected type of wording illustrates a dysfunctional relationship between the two students. The narrator presents an event from a Romanian school that could be examined by key terms: event, school life, communication, relationship, evocation. As a text, the case contains a conclusion: both students were finally punished.

b) From the vantage point of methodology of research the texts are methods. The hypothesis is linked to the topic of classroom management, as follows:

"The case was selected by the internet accessing of combination 'student-teacher conflict'. The example I have chosen is in line with the hypothesis assumed in the classroom management: solutions, principles, methods and techniques, classroom management strategies in practice do not have a pre-established algorithm because they all have a guiding value. The incident took place during the music education class, in the city F., in the year 2013. Due to the fact that the two students laughed during the music class, the music teacher – considered to be an esteemed professor by the local community – decided to dismiss temporarily from one of their classroom.

The pupil C. N., 11 years old, a Gypsy, was amused by a joke made by a colleague's drawings. The twin's sister who gathered her personal belongings and her brother left the classroom. The teacher ran to call them back but they left the school. The twins climbed into a taxi and went home; we don't know the two brother's version of the story. Their eldest brother (23 years old) quickly came to school, entered the classroom during music class and physically assaulted the teacher. The media uncovered the story and the pupils went to hospital to visit their teacher.

The example tackles the state of the contemporary Romanian society, how people feel; how people relate to one another; what are the differences of education between one individual and another; and behavioural typologies.

What are the major issues in contemporary Romania?
What are the mentalities assimilated by the Jipsy communities?
Could the teacher behaviour influence the students' behaviour? How?
How to avoid the conflict?
Who assumes the responsibility for the pupils' actions?
What does 'solidarity' mean for those involved in the case (Jipsy community, school, Romanian society, etc.)?
It is fair to take matters into yours hands?
Do such cases occur only during music class?
Do the pupils recognize the 'example' of the music teacher?
The twins came from Italy and were integrated after the beginning of the school year. The school is like a lab. If you want to change something, the change can only be made with effort. You have to analyse, study, get involved and then take the rewards."

The analysis of this case illustrates both explicitly and implicitly the characteristics of this type of rhetoric. Firstly, the respondent argued engaging in the task: it is about an authentic exercise in both post-postmodernism and metamodernism trends to prepare the case. Secondly, the narrative incorporates basic information about the background - theories and principles from the classroom management (Trif, 2013) relevant for the purposes of the article - , a short description of the case, a link between the academia (principles, strategies, etc) and the life
beyond the library –links with the media and with the whole Romanian society -, critical examination of the case study correlated with multimodality trif, 2013), conclusions. The wording selected is creative surprising by the fresh image and offer the psychological constraints of the descriptive situation. The comments and the reflections of the respondent are negative: they refer to a link of social learning machinery within Romanian schools. The culture of curriculum is dependent by this unethical environment of learning. Very often the role of the teacher is not that of an interpreter of the curriculum and the discourse reflects "too much discontinuity of curriculum" (V, Trif, 2015, pp.4).

c)The entire investigation is a case study on the Romanian cognitive representation of case study in the educational system. It is about a unique approach, onane which is not a common wording from the literature in the fieldwork. The following example is relevant:

"A student from the 10th grade is strong and very affected by the way he looks. The student is very shy and quiet. The parents’ rigidity and lack of involvement in the education of their child worsens the situations. In terms of the pupils’ behavior he can described as follows:

-He is always depressed, has no friends and does not socialize with other pupils in class. He feels he is not integrated in the classroom.
-He speaks only when he is directly asked a question.
-He feels better just being alone at the computer, playing for hours.

The teacher who comes to solve the cause uses behavioral monitoring methods to involve students in the learning activities. He also collaborates with other teachers and the school psychologist in order to approach the family. As a result, counseling activities are carried out with the pupil and his parents. The teacher found out that the student was afraid not to embrace himself in front of his colleagues.

The student is afraid to make friends, to show emotional attachment to another person. This explains the difficulty of this student in relating to his colleagues. For the moment, the student feels abandoned by his parents because they did not help him in critical moments. Therefore, the teacher, the school counselor and the principal will apply various techniques and strategies in order to manage the student’s fear and to put an end to such alarming situations."

The case is presented as a whole. From the vantage point of both educational and psychological structure, the case expresses the pupil’s fears. These fears are presented by the respondent as making part of his personality. The child’s mental is important for those involved in solving the situation. The most important question related to this case is how to make descisions regarding cases.

3. DISCUSSIONS

In Romanian schools there are various confusions and misinformations about case study and about understanding successful learning. In sociocultural studies, human agency could be considered a premise: cultural and historical aspects are relevant for a case study. In order to assume human agency (Trif, 2013), it is important to specify the fact that in the Romanian totalitarian era the educational wording about study case was saturated by ideology, stereotypes and prejudices. In this argument prevails the idea that Romanians have no problems in schools, the educational experience is perfect, the communist party is tailoring the values, emotional effects are not important, the school is a complex mechanism to build a new man etc. These practices are related to the vicinity of the former Soviet Union (Trif, 2012): educational problems or limits are ignored. Among the diversity of mispractices some ‘lived experiences’ stand out; in Romania there are no ruptures, tensions or contradictions between different parts of the school seen as an organization. This requires new agents in order to change the borders between social and cultural organizations. While the ideological canon is assumed, the Romanian educational system becomes accommodate to new circumstances. As people engage in new type of environment, the communist human agency is more concretely imposed. This state of art is important because reflects the absence of scientific concerns on case study. For the Romanian epistemic trajectories of case study, the codified message is about ‘epistemystification’ of knowledge-dependent – in educational system are not problems, limits, events or cases. For members of professional communities, the totalitarian cognitive revolution means not to treat case study. After 1990, case study was considered atypical example which without impact in school life or in political culture. Currently, case study is a tool or a method with a view to exploring reality.

The research reveals the extended meaning of case study in the Romanian educational system: case study is a vital part of learning, a tool to monitor progress, a way to investigate the implications of Romanian policies, the resources to create partnerships with parents and community, and so on. The huge number of case study collected provide how various generic tasks could be improved in schools. A great part of the narratives is extracted from the Romanian media (Trif, 2014) signaling a wide range of errors from the vantage point of professional judgment. The school is also a place for Romanian children and parents to complain about the
environment. On the other hand, learning is a bad thing – too much learning, too little learning, too difficult learning, too easy learning.

Case study is a cognitive tool, a way of combining theory and practice, an investigative approach, a current problem, an axiological space (the dynamics of the players’ values are very important into a case), a risk situation, an authentic piece of life school, an example of the curriculum peculiarities, etc.

From a technical point of view the identity of Romanian cases is convergent with some topics: uncommunicativeness, frustrations, misunderstandings, misinformation, errors, misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices, conflicts, tensions, devaluation, and so on. It is about psychological coverage of the content analysis.

From the vantage point of semiotics the coverage of ‘case study’ must be studied as a descriptive situation in its social context (Halliday, 1994). Each case is complex because significant elements are interconnected: social motives, social relationships, cultural contents, expectations, various actors, gender issues (Trif, 2014), etc.

From a multiform perspective (Trif, 2015), a case study illustrates moral mechanisms, curriculum culture, professional commitment, models, preferences, experiences, practices, skills, strategies, innovative solutions, scientific alternatives, required competencies, school’ culture, and so on. Each case study could be at the same time a logical problem, a story problem, a critical thinking problem or a problem solving. For these reasons, it is important to identify relational similarities between data, to generate an analogical transfer, to clarify the problem, to predict the success of chosen solution, etc. In terms of the story problem (Trif, 2015), the case study could be interpreted as a linguistic structure involved into the problem description: discourse as a text, discourse as a process, discourse as a dialogue, discourse as an interaction in society.

Critical exegesis of data collected suggests that it is difficult to understand the curricular congruence of the situations. It is not an algorithm of solving case study because the of misunderstandings could appear, each case requires a new individual or a collective exercise. Despite the fact that there are a few type problems, each case study is a probabilistic expression of the school reality.

Meta-analysis of the findings suggests the need of flexibility in examining contradictions, comparing solutions, clarifying nuances of attitudes, recognizing psychological mechanisms. There is a high degree of uncertainty about how to prepare decision makers for new work practices. The problem can be tackled by asking as follows:

- How to judge cases?
- By which criteria to assess the discursive and nondiscursive behaviors (gesture, body movement, etc.) involved in the case study?
- Why (undertaking the case)?
- What are the facts and what are the symbols involved in the case?
- How to reconcile mistakes in moral reasoning, groups misconduct, cultural conflicts?
- How to teach honesty / integrity?
- How to measure ethic attitude?
- How individuals participate and interact in social settings?

Beyond the various discourses on case study from the literature in the field, the heterogeneity of issues presented by the target population, and the multicultural investigations this article delineates the conventional meanings of a case study’s most important aspects for East European reaserchers. In other words, the exegesis is unique because it is not focused on routinized paradigms; the paper examines the contemporary particular explanations in the field and predicts inferences with the future educational reality according to the basic epistemology. The consequence is a paradoxical situation: the qualitative reasearch represents a particular configuration that could be considered: a case-study on case study, a study of culture at a distance, a problem solving.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The interpretive approach of the findings could be considered an exercise of analysing presuppositions in terms of complex cognition:

- it is not possible to use an algorythm to solve a case study because it is not possible to anticipate the interrelationships between school environment and curriculum;
- case studies are implicitly linked to the Romanian life school;
- case studies offer a general common sense of education;
- case studies are perceived by the target population as learning barometers or views of school reality;
- case studies presumes the social costs for behavioral management in the classroom.
5. REFERENCES


