PROVOKING SUCCESS: MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN TEACHING

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Abstract

In the postmodern world, the pace at which social changes occur is striking. It motivates people to look for new ways to adapt to the fast-changing environment. In order to avoid the confrontation with potential opponents, people might resort to new methods of exerting influence on actors they deal with. This may force them to use provocation as a means of assisting its users to make an implicit impact on others, without communicating their real targets.

Although, provocation may often be used with a view towards damaging the object, it has the potential to be used as a positive force. It can be an effective tool in teaching, as it can stimulate students to initiate projects in the field of education.

This research aims to determine the essence of the phenomenon of provocation as a tool to be used in society and examine the types of provocation: positive and negative. It will consider the role that provocation can play as a motivational strategy in the process of teaching, primarily at the tertiary level, in comparison to other motivational strategies commonly used in the classroom.

This paper examines how provocation can be utilised in education, as well as its possible advantages and drawbacks.

The paper concludes by analysing the cases of provocation usage in the field of education, as well as the effectiveness of this method in these particular situations.

Keywords: Provocation, motivational strategies, teaching at tertiary level, teaching methodology, English language teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION

Postmodern society is a complex system of interactions in which risk is one of the determining factors. Risks often emerge due to non-linear development of social relations, such as the elimination of limits on time, space, the rapid changes in the field of social and interpersonal relations and social roles and statuses, as well as the erosion of morality [1, p. 158]. In this situation, society evolves by trying to find ways to adapt to the rapid pace of social changes. The wish of social actors to pursue their interests stimulates them to diversify the forms of social interaction in the search for the most effective means of influence that would help them achieve maximum results in the shortest amount of time.

The success of individuals in post-industrial society is largely defined by their ability to communicate effectively and exert an impact on other actors to achieve their targets. A lack of predefined rules and patterns of behavior forces them to neglect the moral and ethical principles that used to be an integral part of social values in the past [2, p. 14]. This results in long-term relationships turning into different forms of short-term collaborations [2, p. 159], flexibility prevails over integrity and honesty towards other members of society [2, p. 159]. People start considering the strategy of social interaction from the perspective of moral nihilism and they abandon/betray their moral principles and start regarding other social actors as objects for one-time use [2, p. 175]. In order to realize their interests, they also resort to methods of outmanoeuvring their opponents, which would previously be considered morally wrong and unacceptable. They try to conceal their genuine motives from others in order to influence them and provoke their opponents into undertaking actions that would benefit them.

2 METHODOLOGY

As this paper aims to analyze the application of positive provocation in the field of education, the research itself is based on the analysis of the essence of provocation and provocative strategies of social interaction. Provocation is analyzed in terms of its semantics and as a social phenomenon. The
usage of positive provocations is investigated with the help of case studies in the context of teaching in classes and within project work assignments.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The notion of provocation

In terms of semantics, provocation is defined by many dictionaries in the following way.

The term *provocation*, as well as its derivatives, has a number of meanings with *stimulus or incentive* at the core. It is mostly used with a negative connotation, implying an action that triggers *anger* or even *violence*: it is considered a statement, action or ‘unfriendly behaviour’ that causes anger or resentment [3], [4] is ‘intended to make someone angry’ [3], or ‘is a reason for someone else to react angrily’ [5].

A *provocator* is ‘a challenger, instigator, inciter, irritator’ [3]. A *provocateur*, which is sometimes considered as a synonym to *provocator*, denotes ‘a writer, artist, political activist, etc. whose works, ideas, or activities are regarded as a threat to accepted values or practices’ [6] though it may have a more pejorative meaning (often used as an *agent provocateur*) and may imply that someone might ‘encourage people to do something illegal so that they can be arrested’ [5] or deliberately behave ‘controversially in order to provoke argument or other strong reactions’. *Provoking* often means causing ‘a reaction, especially a negative one’ [7] and can be used in such word combinations as: ‘provoke worries’; ‘provoke a furious reaction’; ‘provoke outrage’; ‘provoke a fight’; ‘provoke hostility’, etc.

The analysis of these terms allows a number of conclusions to be made about the controversial nature and the negative aspects of provocative actions.

- A provocation is often a means of influence that aims to trigger a strong reaction, oftentimes a negative one like anger, indignation, fear, or shock;
- Provocative actions are mostly intended and deliberate, so they are meant to achieve a particular response;
- The clear intentions of the provocator suggest that they have the motivation to provoke;
- Provocations are intended to cause strong emotional reactions, which lets us conclude that the emotional aspect should be used to exert influence on the object of the provocation and probably make them act on the spur of the moment. Most probably, the resulting strong emotions could prevent the object from thinking logically and, therefore, lets the provocator manipulate the opponent’s actions.
- Due to the controversial nature of provocations, they can be used to provoke reactions from the object that might be considered illegal and, thus, has negative consequences for them. Therefore, provocative actions could be ‘weaponized’ and used as means of struggle against the object of provocations.

It is obvious that using such sophisticated techniques to exert influence on the opponent would be useless if the intentions of the provocator are voiced, so provocations should be carried out in a surreptitious manner.

The negative impact of provocations has been described by a number of, primarily Russian, scientists. In their view, the term *provocation* denotes an action of destructive nature. It is considered to be a triggering action from the provocator that causes the object to lose in a struggle. The instigation of acts that are likely to lead to adverse consequences for the opponents can be considered a means of political fight or can be carried out with the intention of undermining the opponent’s reputation and authority. [8]–[10]. Provocation at an international level might be used to program the opponent’s reaction to an escalation of events.

Provocation is regarded as a complex and multi-stage phenomenon, the results of which are dependent on how elaborate each stage of it is [11, p. 15]. In addition, provocation can be considered an intentionally developed technology of usage of information for political influence. It is noted that provocations are frequently used to wage an informational war to destabilize a political situation, disrupt the political actions of parties, leaders, disinform the public and manipulate its opinion [12, p. 283].
It is obvious that there are considerable risks inherent in provocations. Provocation poses a threat to both the subject and the object. The subject, when using provocation for negative intentions, uses it to call forth emotions or a negative response from the object and so generates risks that could potentially cause him or her harm. However, provocation is risky, as the object can find out the real intentions of the subject and later retaliate.

These findings suggest that negative provocation is a risky and complex activity where the subject aims to induce a struggle with an opponent; the purpose of this struggle is safeguarding their interests through jeopardizing the ones of the opponent or inflicting harm with the help of imposing new social conditions.

### 3.2 Positive provocation and the areas of its application

#### 3.2.1 The essence of positive provocation

Although provocation is understood by scientists mainly as being instrumental in damaging an opponent [13, p. 74], [14, p. 12], [15, p. 39], [16, p. 90], [17, p. 34], it can successfully be used as a tool to help resolve a number of personal and social issues.

A growing number of scientists stress that provocation may be used to create something new in the development of culture, art [18], [19] and can serve as an effective tool in the field of education. The creative potential of provocation lies in its ability to encourage a person through emotional stimuli to act in a predetermined way and its secretive nature helps to keep them unaware. Being defenseless, the object of provocation acts according to the provocator’s plan.

This is a scenario that is similar to the one of a negative provocation, but it could be advantageous to both the provocator and the object of the provocation (a win-win situation). Although manipulative in its nature, provocation, when used with consideration of the interests of the object, can be constructive.

#### 3.2.2 Positive provocation in ancient philosophy

In ancient times, philosophers were the first to use the creative potential of provocations to change the perception of the reality by social actors. Socrates discovered the vast potential of this phenomenon and its ability to assist in fostering the development of analytical skills of a conversation partner and encourage them to form an independent way of thinking. He used provocations to involve people in discussions, clarify and get rid of dogmas, and foster the formation of their own independent vision, stimulating their minds and expanding their analytical capability. He resorted to positive provocations in order to involve people in lively debates on some of the aspects of their dogmatic assertions to make them obvious and to spur people to form their own opinion. He tried to open people’s minds and sometimes even galvanize them into renouncing the beliefs that were imposed by society [19], enabling them to form a new world outlook and some situations even helped them radically change and rebuild their lives [20, p. 168].

The actions taken by philosophers were driven by noble, altruistic motives to combat vice and social problems, although they were interested in promoting their own ideas and instilling their vision. They exerted influence through strong emotions, such as fear, fury, indignation or shock, which triggered a reaction to the obtained information from the side of the addressees and spurred them to think it over or even take action. The philosophers realized their intentions without declaring them to those who they interacted with, they concealed them and they did so to prevent retaliation at the initial stage, the secrecy enabled them to guide their addressees through the ‘activation’ of their minds and help them to start analyzing facts rather than just relying on the existing social dogmas.

The aforementioned form of interaction may be classified as positive provocation as it contains all the key elements of it: It is carried out secretly with its purpose hidden from other social actors and it is done with a clear target and intention in mind, be it the personal goal of promoting the ideas that the provocator believes in or his intention to contribute to the resolution of social problems. Emotions assist in triggering strong reactions which stimulate social actors into taking the steps that are planned by the provocator. Still, despite being manipulative to some extent, this interaction strategy aims to achieve a win-win situation, beneficial to both parties involved, the mastermind and its vis-à-vis.

### 3.3 Positive provocation in the field of education

Nowadays, provocative strategies previously implemented by philosophers for hundreds of years can be successfully used in the field of education for the purpose of developing students’ critical thinking.
skills at the tertiary level. Intellectual provocation that originated in the doctrines of ancient scholars, e.g. Socrates in his famous Maieutics who used suggestive questions [21], can be an effective means of stimulating mental functions of students in class, it can be used to enhance the tutor’s explanations and mobilize the learners’ intellectual potential. Intellectual provocation can result in a more profound analysis of the matter that is being studied [22].

Utilizing such an approach to encourage the ideas that the provocator wants to instill may result in mistrust and they might subsequently be met with opposition from the side of their conversation partners. Provoking may assist in engaging students in the discussion and sway their opinions to make them more responsive to the ‘right’ ideas.

The provocation in question is manipulative in its nature, as the real intentions of the tutor are not revealed, the students may fail to understand that their actions are guided in a way that the tutor intends and the conversation itself can be perceived as a game with a number of questions and answers. Intellectual provocation consists of several stages:

- determination of stereotypes and prejudice thanks to the tactics of provocative ignorance;
- consideration of stereotypes together with the statements that are in conflict with them and provoking the object to ponder the essence of stereotypes and prejudice and replacing them opposing views;
- usage of suggesting questions and consideration of a number of practical examples for comprehensive analysis [23, pp. 118–119].

The trigger of intellectual provocation may be a seemingly accidental demonstration by the lecturer of weak points in their judgement, such as a one-sided view of the issue. The weak points cannot be too obvious, as the social role of the lecturer presupposes profound knowledge in the subject. Still, they need to be noticed, so that they may initiate a discussion from the side of the students and spark their interest in the further analysis of the matter in question. Such statements made by the professor may result in an emotional reaction, such as surprise or even indignation, some ambitious students might be provoked into trying to disprove the lecturer’s statement and show their sophistication and profound understanding of the issue.

At the stage of a heated debate the lecturer may start asking suggestive questions giving hints of their own viewpoint by stressing a particular opinion that is supposed to be the right one. Certainly, there are no perfect questions, so the lecturer needs to be flexible in adapting them. Another important thing is that the lecturer shouldn’t explicitly support any of the opposing opinions until the end of the discussion.

Such strategies of holding debates can foster the ambition of learners to make fair and careful judgements and develop their critical thinking skills, which helps them perform analyses of all the information they acquire and revise their world view based on these analyses, rather than stereotypes. This provocation is mutually beneficial and is aimed at achieving goals that are advantageous to both parties. The lecturer engages the students in an active discussion on the subject and gets his or her message across to them.

Moreover, if they use strategies that start lively debates, they manage to spark the students’ interest and make their classes more exciting and effective. The feedback from the students may have a significant positive impact on the lecturer’s reputation and may bolster his image in the eyes of both students and the university’s management, paving the way to a successful career. This can be one of the lecturer’s personal targets and reasons for using intellectual provocation in class – achieving career goals through more effective and engaging seminars.

As we see, both the provocator (the lecturer) and the object of the provocation (the students) benefit from it, both parties’ interests are safeguarded: students are motivated to study, they get more profound knowledge than in ‘traditional’ classes; the tutor attains a sense of achievement, as they have increased the effectiveness of the classes, they may have a chance of becoming popular with the students and improve their overall image at the university. Positive provocation spurs on the ‘interaction partner’ to develop themselves further [24].

Thus, positive provocations can be successfully used in the field of education. Let us consider another example of how they can be implemented. Two lecturers of a Russian university made a decision to hold a video interviewing contest in English for the students from their department. They intended to enable the students to improve their command of the English language and acquire or perfect the skills that are critical for success in multimedia journalism. Although improving the students’ English
language skills was one of the primary goals of the competition, the lecturers were keen to hold the contest as another of their targets was to improve the prestige of their language department among the students as well as their own personal prestige, which could potentially have a positive impact on their careers. It was essential that the students were unaware of the hidden motives of the lecturers. If they had been revealed, students might have thought that the competition might be not interesting and was held only for publicity purposes and was only for the benefit of the university.

The lecturers developed the concept of the competition, worked out its conditions and informed the students about the start date. It was suggested that the participants create short videos of 15-25 minutes each. The members of the project teams were supposed to work as broadcast journalists and formulate the concept of their project, create the script for the video, film and edit it. Although many students found the project rather appealing, they felt uneasy about it being quite time-consuming and the large amount of work put them off too.

It was essential that the students were motivated to invest their effort in the project, so the lecturers decided to give the students an extra incentive. They promised to reward the winners of the competition with additional points towards their academic rating. Using this motivational factor assisted in triggering the students’ general interest in the competition and collecting a sufficient number of applications.

When the competition had finished, the winners and the participants acknowledged that they enjoyed it and had gained valuable experience that could be used in the future in their professional activities. In their view, the competition helped improve their overall qualification.

• it boosted their language skills;
• enabled them to acquire video editing skills and to improve filming techniques;
• enhanced their ability to collaborate on a project;
• gave them an opportunity to work in a team;
• helped them to gain a more in-depth insight into their future profession of multimedia journalist.

Although the benefits of the competition were obvious to its participants at the end of the competition, they weren’t at the start. What the potential participants saw was mostly the drawbacks – having to handle a complex and time-consuming project. Of course, stating the primary goal of improving the general image of the language department would have made the students think that the competition didn’t serve their interests. This encouraged the lecturers to conceal some of their motives, use the trigger (the academic rating boost) to spark the students’ interest and provoke them into getting involved.

The lecturers’ actions can be regarded as positive provocation for several reasons:

• the primary goals weren’t revealed to the object of the provocation;
• the actions were slightly manipulative in nature;
• the actions were intended;
• a trigger was used to stimulate the object to act according to the provocators’ plan;
• their actions served the interests of both parties involved – they were beneficial to both the provocators and their objects (the participants of the competition).

If we compare the provocative teaching methods that were used in the case described with the traditional motivational strategies that presuppose more direct methods of motivating, we may see a distinctive advantage to using provocative motivational strategies as they help lecturers to trigger the initial interest in the educational activities and further engage students in project tasks. It is particularly helpful if the real motivation of the lecturers behind giving tasks may cause opposition from the potential participants, i.e. students.

Of course, using provocative strategies is not devoid of its drawbacks, the main of which is it being a risky activity. As the long-term benefits of the positive provocation are often not obvious to the object of the provocation, they may be opposed to what is being done by the provocator. Any provocation presupposes using manipulative techniques and the objects of the provocation may demonstrate a negative reaction towards provoking them. In the worst case, this may lead to their reluctance to follow the lecturer’s instructions or even spark a conflict between them.
For improving the overall performance, it is essential that traditional motivational techniques be used, those that are aimed at improving extrinsic and intrinsic motivations [25–27]. This will enable the students to achieve tangible results and have a sense of achievement after the task is accomplished. Although positive provocations are inherently risky, they give lecturers additional opportunities to improve their teaching techniques and make them more profound and effective. They may be successfully applied in combination with the motivational techniques mentioned above.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Provocative teaching techniques may be the answer to the problem of educating the leaders of tomorrow. As stated above, using positive provocations may help university tutors to encourage their students to think critically and gain a more in-depth insight into the problems they study and they may assist lecturers in helping learners become thinkers that are not dependent on social stereotypes and dogmas. Yet, the domain of positive provocation requires further research, especially in terms of the risks involved in using positive provocations and other areas of its application in social interaction in postmodern society rather than the field of education.

REFERENCES


