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The social representations theory in the interdisciplinary study of the educational discourse – the potential of the collective biography writing

KEYWORDS

Social Representations Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Collective Biography Writing

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the theory of social representations which is not well-known in the Polish pedagogy and which may constitute an interesting theoretical and methodological perspective for the study of the educational discourse. The theory itself is interdisciplinary and therefore may be useful in research carried out within various academic disciplines both in the humanities and social sciences. Theoretical analyses will also concern the possibilities of conducting research of educational discourse within the framework of the social representation theory with the application of the collective biography writing which may be perceived as the critical discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the theory of social representations (TSR) which is not well-known in the Polish pedagogy and which may constitute an interesting theoretical and methodological perspective for the study of the educational discourse. The theory itself is interdisciplinary and therefore may be useful in research carried out within various academic disciplines, both in the humanities and social sciences. Theoretical analyses will also concern the possibilities of conducting research of the educational discourse within the framework of TSR with the application of the collective biography writing which may be perceived as the critical analysis of discourse (CAD).

A thorough, systematised and logical presentation of these extensive and complex topics will require references to additional sources (footnotes), since it is impossible to include all key aspects in one paper, especially that they are explored in very few Polish studies.

2. Social representations as tools for describing and understanding reality

Serge Moscovici, a French social psychologist who developed TSR, argued that the concept of social representations could be used to analyse the ways in which the academic theory regarding psychoanalysis is disseminated within society and changes its language, thinking and actions. Moscovici intentionally refrained from formulating a univocal definition of social representations and he described them as "a system of values, ideas and practices that perform two functions: firstly, they establish an order that allows individuals to navigate in the material and social world and become familiar with this world; secondly, they enable communication between community members, providing them with codes for social exchange as well as for naming and clear classification of various aspects of their world and the individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973: xvii; quoted in: Flick 2012: 48).

Contrary to scientific knowledge, social representations are generated by common sense.[1] With its help, one can try to understand "the new" – new ideas, cultures, objects, phenomena – through associations with anything that is already known and familiar. When something is named and classified into categories, becoming related to other objects of the same kind, every member of the community can speak about it. Representations allow people to understand reality, since each community has its own systems of representations (of various objects and phenomena, e.g. politics, school, education etc.).[2] Members of the same group can develop representations which bind them, structure their reasoning as well as direct and lead their actions. They help them understand the world and live in the world. Social representations, therefore, refer to the construction of the collective reality by a specific social group for whom these representations are the guiding tools that allow to interpret social situations and act accordingly.

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[1] Moscovici also compares social representations to a trunk that grows branches of common sense theories which are "cognitive systems with their own logic, language (...)." Social representations do not represent individual "opinions on", "images of" or "attitudes towards", but they are "theories" or "branches/disciplines of knowledge" that allow to know and structure reality" (quoted in: Augoustinos, Innes, 1990: 215).

[2] Readers interested in social representations can find information and study cases in the online journal *Papers of Social Representations*.

Social representations must not be perceived as logical and coherent models/ patterns of thinking. Using the concept of *cognitive polyphasia*, TSR emphasises that everyday thinking on any subject may be full of fragments and contradictory ideas (Jovchelovitch, Priego-Hernandez, 2015). Polyphasia refers to the state when different kinds of knowledge based on various rationalities function simultaneously in the mind of an individual or within the social consciousness, which is directly related to the necessity of flexible communication and pluralism in the public discourse. According to Jovchelovitch (2007), social representations constitute areas of knowledge which are constantly moving, while the researcher may focus on how different representations clash and compete within the social sphere, how they co-exist in the same context, in the same social group or even in the same individual.

Studies on the concept of TSR include a definition of social representations that illustrates their nature: "a social representation is a collective phenomenon, referring to a community and construed jointly by individuals during their daily actions and conversations. (...) Instead of imagining a social representation as residing *within* minds one should see it as residing *in-between* minds, resembling a canopy made of human actions and communications. In short, " a social representation is a collection of thoughts and emotions expressed in open and verbal actions of individuals and constituting objects for a social group" (quoted in: Trutkowski, 2007: 339).[3]

3. The social representations theory as the interdisciplinary basis for theory and methodology

The focus on representations of social and communicational phenomena makes TSR extremely relevant to studies in various disciplines, since it refers to the overall system of knowledge within the complexity of the social world (impossible to include within narrow and specialised disciplines).[4] A researcher who uses TSR abandons the vision of the world enclosed on conceptual models and binary analyses. He or she chooses an interpretation of objects/phenomena/worlds of different nature that come into this broad perspective. However, such a researcher does not

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[3] The key assumptions of TSR can already be found in Polish studies: Trutkowski 2000, 2007; Niesiobędzka, 2005; Szwed 2011; Zbróg, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Krasuska-Betiuk 2014, 2015a, 2015b; 2016; Zbróg Z., Zbróg P., 2016.

[4] "[In] the system of knowledge there are no absolutely independent (isolated) disciplines. If the area of research of each discipline overlaps with research areas of other disciplines, there can be no radically monodisciplinary areas of research" (Poczobut, 2012: 55-56).

refer to any transcendent categories, but focuses on objects (phenomena, worlds) located in particular time and space, though impossible to extract from the given fragment of the world and resisting any univocal description.

Bogusław Śliwerski argues that "the search of identity and distinctiveness of each social science discipline based on the sources of their thoughts, ideas, doctrines or movements defeats the purpose, as does the search of distinctive study method and object for each discipline" (Śliwerski, 2016: 31), because "representatives of particular disciplines use views of the same thinkers to justify the origin and distinctiveness of their own branch" (ibidem: 30). This argument is even more convincing in view of the fact that all related disciplines in the field social sciences study people and the environment of their life and development. "This subject matter can be observed and conceived in different ways, but social phenomena remain wholes that are explored by representatives of various disciplines from slightly different perspectives. Thus, social researchers ask different questions about the same object of study" (Krauz-Mozer, Ścigaj, 2013: 13). The situation is similar with respect to study methods which are distinguished by the adjective: pedagogic, psychological, political, sociological etc., but in fact they are study methods of the humanities and/or social sciences. "A method is not a function of the object of study, but of the study goals, i.e. the questions that are asked and answers that are sought" (ibidem).

If we assume that pedagogy studies broadly understood educational processes and the conditions of the educational discourse, then the object of study and theoretical categories faced by pedagogues leave no doubt as to the fact that should be treated as an open and inevitably interdisciplinary field which is developed through sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and many other disciplines. Furthermore, the research field of pedagogy/education often exceeds what can be directly observed, so if a pedagogue want to solve complex research problems, he or she must describe them from an interdisciplinary perspective. Only then one can understand the network of multiple interactions specific to the given area.

Analyses with the use of TSR allow to apply the perspective that integrates the humanities and social sciences, thereby becoming interdisciplinary.

4. Relations between discourse and the social representations theory

From the very start the author of TSR emphasised the relations between social representations and communication processes, recognising language as the carrier of social representations and a tool for their transfer, reconciliation and dissemi-

nation. The linguistic element of representations refers to the verbalised reality (discourse), while the extra-linguistic element pertains to the world of symbols, images and social practices that are also included in the research category of discourse.[5] Both language and symbols functioning in the public sphere constitute significant aspects of social representations, being at the same time the key elements of communication and discourse that remain interdependent and integral. They ensure the exchange of ideas, mutual understanding, collecting information and dissemination of established convictions, concepts, ideas and images. The role of language as the carrier of social representations is not limited to the communicational function, but it also relates to the process of making sense of reality as well as construing and expressing the world in which we live.

Moscovici described how, on the one hand, social representations enable social communication, and the mutual understanding between social groups in particular, while, on the other hand, they also constitute "a product of discourse: it is through communication that representations emerge in the collective consciousness and are reproduced" (quoted in: Szwed, 2011, p. 49). Discourse ensures the exchange of thoughts and collecting of information about the world as well as dissemination of ideas, convictions, images and theories in the form of social representations. "The source of social representations of phenomena, objects, problems and ideas is the knowledge circulating within discourse, the knowledge which is revealed in communication and whose form is modified depending on individual experiences, interests and beliefs" (Szwed, 2011: 22). The fact of sharing representations means that they are modelled in the process of social communication wherein their mutual relations are generated and defined. Shared representations determine the scope of available models of interpretation and constitute the reality we live in, i.e. the shared models of reality.

TSR is closely related to other theoretical concepts, because it studies the social knowledge, accentuating the processes of communication and social relations in generating this knowledge. Many researches strived to integrate TSR with other theoretical frameworks of psychology and social sciences, which resulted in the combination of TSR with semiotics, positioning theory, identity theories, collective memory, social cognition, stereotypes etc. (see: Zbróg 2016a). With time, different empirical approaches were developed, corresponding to different theoretical approaches in the studies of social representations, which gives multiple opportunities of analysis and interpretation in new contexts. For instance, this theory offers

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[5] "Discourse uses words, but also other elements, e.g. clothes, when museum exhibitions are prepared, political demonstrations are organised, prescriptions are written in a clinic or a prisoner is locked. There is no situation when discourse remains silent" (Śpiewak, 2002: 18).

a new approach enabling in-depth analyses of how the media and communities/ social groups construe their vital questions.[6] The use of TSR as a theoretical and methodological basis allows to analyse the content of the public discourse and its context as well as to observe the language means in the processes of anchoring and objectification[7], and to determine what results from the given media message for the way of acting and thinking of its recipients. Representations provide the form that organises our knowledge about the world/the social knowledge, but the also determine our decisions and actions.

5. Discourse analysis and the study of social representations

TSR is an open theory which, as wished by its author, Serge Moscovici, is constantly developing in line with the dynamics of new knowledge. This openness has turned out to be the real life of this theory, since the followers of TSR continue their theoretical and empirical studies that allow to further develop this concept.

The options to use discourse analysis as the study approach to TSR have been often analysed by researchers (McKinlay et al., 1993; Potter, Edwards, 1999; Trutkowski, 2004; Ostrowicka-Miszewska, 2006; Szwed, 2011). Initially, this connection was far from obvious. The critical analysis of the basic differences between the discursive approach and TSR, performed by Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards (1999), was the springboard for regulating the aspects omitted in the theoretical and empirical foundations of TSR (e.g. regarding the analysis of conversation), making TSR ineffective with respect to the conceptualization of context-based actions and inadequate to the emerging new methods of viewing reality. The key objection to TSR was that it failed to take into account the complexity of action and interaction (Potter, Edwards, 1999: 448-449) and that it treated representation mainly as a cognitive phenomenon or object used by people to make sense of the world, but not as a discursive object (Potter, Edwards, 1999: 449).

It motivated researchers to correct the insufficiencies of the initial concept in the next theoretical and empirical developments. At present, TSR is an effective conceptual basis for studies that try to answer this question: *What do people know* (about a given object, phenomenon, process), *how do they think about it and how do they act in result*? (Flick, 2011; Flick et al., 2015). The analyses of Wolfgang Wagner regarding

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[6] The Polish authors who explore this field of study include Cezary Trutkowski (2000), Helena Ostrowicka-Miszewska (2006) and Robert Szwed (2011).

[7] These basic mechanisms of communication observed within TSR are described along with study cases in: Trutkowski, 2000; Szwed, 2011; Zbróg 2016b.

the relation between social representation and actions show that "people represent social objects in and through actions" (Wagner, 2015: 22). The best example (one of the many confirming Wagner's findings) is the ethnographic study in a Finnish primary school performed by Kati Kasanen, Hannu Räty and Leila Snellman (2001). It provided evidence of the role of action in microgenetic processes related to the construction of social representations. The researchers observed that the teachers modify the arrangement of seats in the classroom based on their conceptions of *educability*. The new arrangement of seats requires that pupils should conform to the reconstruction of the representation of their position in the classroom hierarchy and adapt to educability. Coping with those changes consists in overt actions, conversations between pupils and disputes with the teacher. Results of these actions (interactions) impact the new representations in the altered situation. The study indicated that modifications of representations manifested by the teacher influenced the arrangement of seats as well as the behavioural space available to pupils, which, in turn, changed their representations. Many other studies (e.g. Lloyd, Duveen, 1992; Renard et al., 2007) prove that "the imposed model will eventually be accepted as the new social representation" (Wagner, 2015: 20), as it was in the case of pupils in the rearranged classroom. The pupils changed their actions and reflected the imposed situational modifications in their discussions, so they developed a social representation that made the new aspect a part of their common sense. It also confirmed the idea that a change is not an effect of contemplation or individual reflection, but of the collective discussion and action. In consequence, action should be treated as the foundation for new representations. Based on empirical findings (see: Wagner, 2015), it can be concluded that the change of representation to what is socially expected must involve discussions in the group and actions undertaken in new circumstances. As a result, we can identify the theoretical vision of representations shared in a group and driving actions of the group members who achieve the goal together. It follows that "social representations cannot be conceived only as mental constructs" (Wagner, 2015: 27). Our actions contribute to the construction of our world and reality in which we function, creating (reconstructing) new representations.

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The discursive nature of the materials used in the studies of social representations resulted in new theoretical and empirical research that take into account the fact that representations are discursive objects which people construe in their conversations and texts as specific versions of the world (Potter, Edwards, 1999: 451). Considering these results, the key (but not only) methods of studying social representations include such qualitative methods of collecting data as individual and

group interviews (especially focus group interviews) and participant observation, while the commonly used methods of data analysis cover the analysis of documents, conversations and discourse (Flick et al., 2015; Krasuska-Betiuk, Zbróg, 2017).

Traditional methods of analysing conversations, discourse and documents (e.g.. Rapley 2010) are based on the spoken or written language. Since the term "discourse analysis" has multiple meanings, when I present the collective biography writing which may be used to analyse discourse, I will explain that, following Tim Rapley, I understand discourse analysis as "the use of language in specific contexts" where "a context may be a piece of conversation or an entire historical period" (Rapley 2010: 22). Since language is not an innocent, neutral and transparent means of communication, the way it is used informs researchers of discourse about how individuals see the world and what meanings they give to objects.

Certainly, a discourse analysis cannot be seen as a homogeneous, unified approach. Each discipline within the humanities and the social sciences has developed its own terminology and assumptions regarding materials for analysis of what can be recognized as "data" and regarding the research procedure.

Studies of social representations usually conceive discourse sociologically, i.e. as a communicational action and its context related to the communicational situation, the status of people engaged in communication and relations between them. Researchers focus on the social construction of reality and signification processes, on language-in-use which, as a product of human actions, interactions, history, society and culture, informs what is excluded and what is shared in a given description of reality. It also allows to determine the active meanings and the social hierarchy (who or what has power/power of decision) during communication, thereby referring to CAD.

5.1. Collective biography writing[8] as a special example of the critical analysis of discourse

CAD combines the analysis of text and speech with determination of the influence that various groups of interest have in the society and it studies the instances

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[8] Collective Biography Writing (CBW) is a relatively new method of studying autobiographical memories, developed by Bronwyn Davies i Susanne Gannon, Australian researchers from the University of Western Sydney. This paper has, unfortunately, no space to present details of the theory and practice of CBW. This information can be found in: Davies, Gannon, 2006, 2012; Wihlborg, 2013, 2015; Zbróg 2016d, 2016e, 2016f. Some text are now in print, e.g. *Podmiot-w-procesie. Poststrukturalistyczna analiza wspomnień w grupach studenckich metodą zbiorowego pisania biografii* (Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny) and one article with an example of analysis: *Zbiorowe pisanie biografii jako metoda uczenia się o sobie, o innych, o świecie* (Studia Edukacyjne).

of domination and inequality as well as discrimination and subjugation within discourses. The goal of the critical approach is, apart from observation, systematic description and explanation, to change the reality that is described by discourse. That is the task of the critical reflection on how creation and consolidation of knowledge and values prevents thinking about alternative options and questioning what seems necessary and universal (Fairclough, Wodak, 2006; Ostrowicka, 2015). A critically-oriented analysis of discourse assumes that "discourse establishes objects of knowledge, social identities and relations between people. As such, it profiles cognition as well as positions, expresses and constitutes power relations. Therefore, the analysis of discourse becomes a tool for studying social, cultural and educational phenomena (Ostrowicka, 2014: 52-53).

The ontological foundations of the collective biography writing include the belief that there is no objective reality and no objective relations, so one should analyse the worlds of relations and meanings construed by people. The aim of analyses within the collective biography writing is not to reveal a hidden "truth", but to deconstruct what is deemed certain. The goal is to destabilise assumptions and thinking models that are recognized as stable and unquestionable truths. What is seen as evident must undergo a critical reflection.

I notice numerous similarities between the study method of the collective biography writing and CAD. The theoretical basis of CAD is poststructuralism, while the collective biography writing is based on a criticism of poststructuralism, i.e. the "second" poststructuralism that focuses on feminist and gender studies and social problems related to power and justice (social inequality, injustice) as well as on being, becoming and learning, which is directly related to the category of the educational discourse. At present, it is difficult to pinpoint this new trend in the development of the poststructuralist theory, as indicated by, among others, Anna Burzyńska (2002: 83-84), who wrote about a tendency to call it changes in the "intellectual mentality" within the humanities, although the changes actually occur in the minds of researchers and people who are the focus of research as a result of the critical process.

Participants of the collective biography writing, similarly to followers of CAD, openly express their critical stance and strive to reveal, demystify or otherwise undermine the structures of domination.[9] They analyse how texts, practices and events are shaped by power relations. CAD and the collective biography writing focus on the thorough analysis of the use of language and on how lan-

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[9] The critical approach in the collective biography writing is explored in the context of Foucault's critical analyses and poststructuralist discourse by: Davies et al. (2006: 89ff.), Wihlborg (2013: 385).

guage/discourse treated as an element of power generates changes of the social world and the culture of a given community. Discourse within the collective biography writing can be seen as interaction between the individual and the group and identified with the exchange of opinions, debates or discussions (Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006), while it must be noted that the biographical method is recognized as one of the tools of interpretive analysis used as part of discourse analysis (Nowicka, 2016: 179).

The CAD study method is usually divided into three stages which generally correspond to analyses performed as part of the collective biography writing:

– The first stage concerns the spoken or written text that is the object of study. The task of the researcher is to explore the thematic structure of the text and to analyse it linguistically.

– The second stage of CAD covers discursive social processes and consists in the analysis of the reception and interpretation of the text by people.

3. The last stage of CAD pertains to socio-cultural practices, i.e. the impact of discourse on the structure of social life and the changes generated by the analysed text (Dobrołowicz, 2013: 117).

In my opinion, the collective biography writing should be recognized as a special study method within CAD, where its unique feature is the different form of textual analysis.[10] The typical characteristic of the collective biography writing method is participation of the studied individuals in the collection and interpretation f data; data are generated by the studied individuals in the research process and their experiences as well as interpretations are taken into account. This is the basic difference between the "standard" CAD variants and the collective biography writing, though, as indicated by the relevant sources, it is by no means an extraordinary situation, since "the intersection and complementariness of conceptual categories and notions derived from various theoretical frameworks can be easily observed in the studies on the discourse of education" (Ostrowicka, 2014: 53).

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[10] The collective biography writing is referred to as an (innovative) research method (Onyx, Small, 2001: 777; Davies, Gannon, 2005: 318; Trahar, 2013: 307; Wihlborg, 2013: 379, 387). After some modifications of the research procedure, this research method can also be used to study the learning process (Davies, Gannon, 2006: 5; Trahar, 2013: 307; Wihlborg, 2013; 2015; Zbróg, 2016e, 2016f; *Zbiorowe pisanie biografii jako metoda uczenia się o sobie, o innych, o świecie* – in print).

5.2. The use of the collective biography writing to study social representations

Helena Ostrowicka (2014: 51), while exploring the variety of theories and methods within the field of discourse analysis, concludes that discourse analysis is perceived "as a collection of specific methods, techniques and research procedures which may be freely selected to solve concrete research problems."

As mentioned beforehand, TSR is an open theory, i.e. Each researcher may add new methods along the way (as knowledge grows), if they prove effective in the study of representations. "The social representations approach – as a theory, not a method – aims to explore how individuals in social groups understand the world around them and how this understanding changes, evolves and what effects it has"(Flick i in. 2015: 64). While seeking information on methods to study social representations, I found the collective biography writing which – in my opinion – may become a new, prolific and discursive research method for social representations.

The collective biography writing focuses on intense sensations and suggestive memories which are analysed collectively according to a pre-defined research procedure (Onyx, Small 2001; Davies, Gannon 2006; Zbróg 2016e). The collective analyses of stories which are then theorised lead to their new meanings. Meanings of actions are negotiated "in interactions with other people, both during the event itself and in the course of reflection" (Onyx, Small, 2001: 776). It is, in fact, a search of socially agreed representations of the given event or process. The collective search of the common understanding of the story allows to see the social nature of the construct of memories and – based on the TSR assumptions – it is the core of the research procedure that identifies social representations.

A significant position in the research method of the collective biography writing is taken by the concept of embodiment that seems quite popular in contemporary social sciences. In this context, embodiment refers to a representation, a material realization of an idea, its visible form, e.g. As a feeling or an emotion. This concept relates to the analysis of memories focused on the body in action, in a concrete setting that is socially established. This concept may be seen as one the trends within TSR where the body is the means for the representations to be carried out ("embodied") in social practices. In this sense, social representations may even be inaccessible to conscious reflection. They are passed on through participation in established practices where they become "embodied" (Wagoner, 2015).

The sensual meticulousness of description during the collective biography writing (i.e. involving emotions, sensations, aromas as well as a precise and con-

scious use of language) generates the same impressions in all members of the group (a domino effect) based on the common sensation models. It results from the fact that people are social creatures, so their relations and reactions to events are also social, universal and conventional, i.e. based on the social representation of the given event. Analyses within TSR prove as social communication and interactions develop, representations of the self and the social world become more and more congruent among the members of the same social group.[11]

5.3. A study of the change of **social representations** during the collective biography writing

When an individual incessantly learns more about himself/herself and about the world, trying to understand his/her own decisions, to find justification and meaning of actions, the change of beliefs and representations of oneself and of the world becomes possible.

The method of the research procedure during the collective biography writing assumes that the first steps identify social representations/shared social knowledge, beliefs and ideas. Usually, texts that are subject to analysis aspire to be an objective representation of reality. The goal is to discover what is culturally defined/imposed.

During the first part of the procedure, the members of the group look for generalisations in the form of stereotypes, cultural imperatives, and metaphors, and then identify what can be recognized as obvious and what can undergo explication of the social and cultural understanding of cyclic events. The discussion also covers concepts, popular sayings and images related to the key theme/object of study, again in order to identify the socially conditioned explanation of meanings that comes to be imposed as evident. All that is given as a ready-made, automatic explanation and cultural interpretation should be revealed at this stage.

The communication between group members (during the collective biography writing) is perceived as the basis for creation and transmission of meaning. Researchers in the field of social representations argue that these representations circulate in the social world in the form of statements, expressions or words in the spoken or written language. Therefore, the analysis of discourse/language in the social world with reference to the identification of social representations is

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[11] For instance, the research among Australian adolescents demonstrated that with age the variance of individual representations significantly dropped. For obvious reasons, there was no absolute consensus, "social representations become more congruent and shared along with the progressing socialisation from adolescence to early adulthood" (Augoustinos et al., 2014: 98).

related to the question of how particular representations are generated, including discursive sources (linguistic and extra-linguistic) that form the basis for such representations.[12]

The second part of the research procedure can be referred to the work on modification of social representations of the given object. The basic task in the collective biography writingis the process of transformation which results in breaking away from thinking models, repetitions and stereotypical explanations that make up the history of the self and the history of "my life" (Davies, Gannon 2012: 369). As part of CAD/the collective biography writing, the subject's position in discourse is identified (which also connects TSR with the positioning concept; Harre, Moghaddam, 2015). Furthermore, oppressiveness of particular discourses and ways of construing power relations and social control by those discourses are also determined.

5.4. Results of the analytic work

The outcome of critical analyses is:
- – description of the target discourse
- – disclosure of how the discourse reflects the relations of power and knowledge
- – determination of the state of knowledge as well as overt and hidden beliefs in the group of researchers, values and purposes of the group, and manifested stereotypes – in other words, determination of the group's social representations which decide how discourses are used to construe the social acceptance of the status quo. This part of the research process also focuses on what is left unspoken (though it is expected in relation to the story told). Silence on a given subject may also be an expressive indication of something deeply significant.

Workshops on the collective biography writing may help (all participants of the analytic/critical process) to break free from automatic behaviour in line with models (i.e. one's social representations which motivate our decisions and actions, so as a result one can abandon certain internalised mechanisms. Social influences which position us in specific beings and existence within the cage of our beliefs may be

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[12] The approach based on social representations allows to observe the basic communicational mechanisms which relate to the process of creating/changing social representations of the given object/phenomenon/process. These mechanisms include anchoring (naming, emotional anchoring, thematic anchoring, metaphorical anchoring and anchoring through basic antinomies) and objectification (emotional objectification and personification). An example of analysis using these mechanisms can be found in: Zbróg, 2016b.

reinterpreted so that we can construe our world and ourselves anew. According to Monne Wihlborg, during the collective biography writing workshops „we strive to realize *what actually happens in our lives* and *what other realities we can find in it*" (Wihlborg 2015: 274). The collective biography writing allows to reach the available toolkit for the creation of meanings which can make our actions meaningful or meaningless. In this light, the method may be treated as a learning method. It is so, because we learn by unlearning the established and rooted models of thinking (see: Zbróg 2016c). This process underlines the act of abandoning what we once learned or acquired in order to move on towards a new, critical perception of the world around us.

6. Conclusions

Based on the first experiments in the empirical research with the use of the collective biography writing as well as in-depth theoretical and methodological investigations related to studies within the social representation theory, I can identify a significant potential in the research practice of the collective biography writing. It is a difficult and complex method which requires more reflection than usual in social research (due to the participation of the entire team in the process of decomposition and deconstruction). I believe that this method will be used more and more often by researchers interested in the identity construction process (*subjects-in-process*)[13] or the formation of subjectivity in the post-modern world. The real value of the method lies not in its originality, but in its potential of emancipation. The final results of the research practice reveal the oppressiveness of discourse and teach critical reflection and the perception of the possibilities inherent in differences. When researchers discover all possible contradictions and differences in the versions of the world, it allows for negotiation of meanings and modification of the culturally established social representations.

It was difficult to achieve the complex goal of this paper, i.e. to explain the social representations theory and use this context in order to describe the collective biography writing as a variety of the critical analysis of discourse that can be applied to studying and modifying social representations. Any description of my theoretical investigations within the scope of one text is a complex endeavour due to the fact that the social representations theory and, specifically, the collective

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[13] Monne Wihlborg argues that subjectivity can be analysed through "studying the mutability of various positions of the subject available within a discourse" (Wihlborg 2015: 267).

biography writing still await thorough and in-depth studies by Polish researchers. The form and length of an academic paper do not allow for an exhaustive explanation of my approach which I hereby present to potential readers for evaluation and verification.

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