

MODELS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH IN THE RUSSIAN SYSTEM OF TEACHERS' TRAINING

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The basic goal of the Russian strategy for education modernization is to achieve new quality of education that would correspond to the new social-economical situation in Russia as well as to the main directions of the world development. One of the key factors for the success of the process is the training of highly qualified educational personnel.

The improved process of teacher training should take into account the rise of demands to basic culture and professional competence of a person, to the development of such personal qualities as:

- responsibility and initiative;
- effectiveness and efficiency of performed activities;
- ability to adapt to quickly changing situation;
- ability to perform multiple choice;
- ability to construct a system of personal values and socially relevant competencies including new type of functional literacy.

Education aimed at developing the above-mentioned qualities should make use of innovative techniques and approaches that are successfully worked out both by Russian and foreign specialists in the course of international cooperation. One of the most promising directions is the

implementation of the learner-centered approach in the system of teacher training.

The necessity of transition from knowledge-centered to learner-centered approach in education is recognized in Russia. However the Russian system of education as a whole still remains rather old-fashioned, mostly translating ready and summarized knowledge rather than personal values, developing and checking memory but not the ability to think. Learner in such situation is considered to be an object to acquire the content of education and to aim at the realization of the state program and not at self-development. The role of a teacher correspondingly is to communicate with the audience - mostly in a monologue style - but not to perform mutual creative work with a learner. Teacher's behavior in such situation is dominated by stereotypes and the value of learner's personality is reduced to performance of certain concrete functions ("relative value") and not considered as "absolute". The essence of educational activity is connected with concrete subject areas and is oriented more on the performance of the achievements of a teacher rather than that of a learner.

The transition to the learner-centered approach would mean the introduction of a new style of professional behavior, a new way of thinking and a new image of a teacher.

In order to overcome the mentioned drawbacks and to facilitate the process of transition the Russian system of education is currently developing a new concept of teacher training which would imply:

- necessity of training a teacher capable of lifelong developing personally and professionally in order to be able to solve new range of problems;

- introduction of learner-centered approach to teacher training programs in order to prepare a future teacher to modern ways of acquisition and transfer of human culture;
- humanization and democratization as the basic principles of teacher training ;
- development of teacher training content as a unity of invariant and variable elements, fundamental and applied, cultural and methodological, theoretical and practical.

Educating a new generation of teachers is a long, complex and controversial process that lasts lifelong. Training of teachers in Russia is the task of pedagogical universities and institutions. According to the new concept and in line with the ideas of learner-centered approach the pedagogical universities make input into this process by offering new professional educational programs which provide study of human culture aiming to set up a system of values where a human being, a child, his life and health , relations with environment and people play a major role. These programs also assist to develop humanistic and tolerant relations among people and orient to interrelation in a dialogue style. In the process of training the students get acquainted with peculiarities of educational work, study main sources where Russian and world educational experience is summarized, develop the need to permanent self-improvement. Much attention is paid to establishing the ability to single out pedagogical problems from the surrounding reality, to describe them, to analyze objective and subjective reasons of their origin, to look for and to find the different ways of solving the problem. Important role is attributed to pedagogical practicum as an element of study process where students are not merely enriched by theoretical knowledge but

acquire corresponding skills to be able to work as a teacher of new generation.

Analysis of the learner-centered educational activity in Russia allows to define a set of key characteristics of modern professional teacher's competency:

- self-development of a teacher, self-realization on the basis of high motivation;
- continuous search for alternative ways of teaching and educating;
- definition and achievement of goals on the basis of personally developed model of education and teaching;
- mutual (teacher and learner) search of the meaning of education;
- introduction of personal elements into the content of teaching and education;
- reflection on teachers personal and professional behavior;
- responsibility for decision-making;
- orientation to dialogue and self-improvement in the process of educational communication;
- creation of educational situation for learners' development;
- development of learner-centered communication style.

In order to provide training for achieving the mentioned competencies the introduction of conceptual principles of the learner-centered approach into the programs of teachers training should be accompanied by the development of learner-centered educational techniques.

Answering this demand the content and the methods for teacher' training inevitably undergo changes. The content starts to include updated and more profound studies of the following components:

- human nature;
- social life and the direction of its development;
- knowledge about education;
- knowledge about teaching and learning processes.

Alongside with traditional lecture-seminar system the new methods emerge:

- research activity;
- innovative activity;
- project-based activity;
- reflective thinking.

The task for teacher trainer at present consists not only in creating the conditions for students to be able to acquire relevant professional competencies but to secure the possibility for personal development of each student. Teacher training process then should represent a source of reflective thinking combined with research based on the relevant theoretical knowledge.

The investigations of Russian specialists show that the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical activity and as a consequence formation of pedagogical competency could be effectively realized by fulfillment of concrete tasks of reflexive-problematic character performed by a team.

Technology of team work in studies of pedagogical science proves to be a success when it is structured according to the following principles:

- it should be aimed at the progress of each participant;
- it should guarantee free communication;
- it should use technologies for cooperative activity.

The use of cooperative activity suggests the combination of group discussions, brain storming, play models, realization of cooperative projects. The work is organized in three interlinked directions:

- orientation to learners' personal development;
- orientation on cooperation and successful communication;
- orientation on productive work alongside with acquiring systematic pedagogical knowledge and skills in solving practical problems.

As mentioned above the tasks performed by a team should be of reflective-problematic character. Reflective thinking serves as the main means for the professional competency development of a future teacher. So, "reflective learning" which allows students to perform a research function in relation to their own activity aiming at critical analysis and evaluation of its efficiency is considered to be a basic technique for teachers' training process aiming at implementation of learner-centered approach. A very important condition for the use of this technique is to provide the openness for research activity for which a trainer has:

- to create understanding of a possibility to have different opinions on one and the same pedagogical event;
- to suggest the use of different ways of description and analysis of one and the same event;
- to give students the opportunity to exchange their opinions during the discussion and decision making process;
- to put together different scientific postulates and the subjective opinions of students;

- to encourage the expression of different ideas and making such kind of decisions which would underline their variable character ;
- to use scientific information to explain the event from different points of view staying within the frames of realistic professional concepts;
- to create a perspective vision by a student of his future professional activity using the multiple choice approach.

When this technique is used it is very important to combine it with the so-called pro-active approach. The pro-active approach means the specific distribution of time when minimum is spent on the explanation of the task to students and the major part is devoted to their autonomous work. The explanation minimum includes the planning of activity. The maximum time is meant for the expression of ideas, discussions, drawing conclusions and planning of activities for solving pedagogical problems. This is supposed to provide more effective development of professional competency elements.

The logics of the above paragraphs show that reflective learning represents a composition of means and methods ensuring the realization of goals of learner-centered approach. There are numerous attempts in the Russian system of teacher training to develop the ways of its practical implementation.

Following the theoretical developments of the Dutch colleagues in arranging the work with students Russian specialists take into consideration the assumption:

within the framework of the reflective learning technique there is a certain scheme for stages of reflection: action – reflection on action

(detailed description) – definition of significant features, discrepancies – creation of several alternative ways of acting – new action.

Using this postulate as a basis for practical implementation it is also important to define basic questions for pedagogical reflection, they are:

1. What happened?
2. What was important, relevant for me? (problem, revelation, unexpected situation)
3. What kind of role it could play for my further thoughts, actions? (alternative variants of actions, educational needs, intentions).

The groups of reflective questions corresponding to the main stages of reflection presented above are shown in the table.

Stages of reflection	Questions for reflection	
1. Action		
2. Reflection on action (detailed description)	1.What did I want? 2.What did I think of? 3.What did I feel? 4.What did I do?	1.What did my pupils want? 2. What did they think of? 3.What did they feel? 4.What did they do?
3. Definition of significant features, discrepancies.	What do you find now most important, relevant? What kind of discrepancies can you define?	
4. Creation of several alternative ways of acting. Finding the most effective	What kind of alternatives can be offered to overcome the discrepancies?	

Stages of reflection	Questions for reflection
one.	
5. New action (effective alternative)	

Practice shows that students experience difficulties mostly with defining the discrepancies. In order to avoid this it is possible to offer a list of possible sites from which discrepancies arise:

1. Between thoughts and feelings.
2. Between self-image of a person and his image as seen by the others.
3. Between self-image of a person and the way of his behavior.
4. Between the description of a person's activity and his real activity.
5. Between the real image of a person and his wishful image.

There are two main rules for reflective discussion: it should be concrete and empathical. To be concrete the following regulations should be followed:

1. Name feelings, thoughts, actions and wishes very exactly.
2. Ask questions like "What?, How?, What kind of...?"etc. instead of "Why?".
3. Avoid monologues, promote dialogue.
4. Speak in present tense.
5. Use pronouns "I, me" instead of "We, all, everybody".
6. Be concrete in putting questions.

To introduce empathy follow the regulations:

1. Make attempt to feel for the other person.
2. Try to understand the other person feelings.
3. Try to understand the reason for such feelings.

In the course of implementation of this technique it was found out that it answers the demands of students who usually feel the need to exchange opinions on the materials studied, to express doubts concerning their activity or to get confirmation of what they consider to be right. Participation in this process is also important from the point of view of:

- possibility to compare personal experience with that of the others,
- critical reflection over the process and the result of own activity,
- further creative structuring of alternative variants of own activities.

It is very important to point out that reflection is carried out throughout the whole study process. Both students and trainers are involved into it, because if one of the subjects is absent in the course of reflection the whole mechanism is non-effective.

Reflection could be carried out in oral and in written forms. Oral reflection is aimed at expressing own attitude and at correlating it with other opinions. Very often students say that expressing their thoughts in the form of a story, a dialogue or questions helps them to clarify certain meaningful problems. From the set of instruments for oral reflection (dialogue, cross discussion or brain storming discussion) let's take one of the most effective examples: "two-row round table" aimed at the exchange of opinions on most important problem for participants.

In order to conduct "two-row round table" a trainer sets up two groups of participants. First group occupies the inner circle. The members of this group have the right to express their opinions on the topic under discussion. It is very important to avoid criticism. The members of the second group ("outer circle") make notes of what the first group members say and prepare their questions and comments. Comments could relate to

the content of the topic, to the process of discussion, to the origin and reasons for different opinions. While the first part of discussion is actively carried out by the members of the first group, the trainer is coordinating the work not interfering into the essence of discussion, watching that the discussion stays within the framework of the problem outlined, and making notes on different opinions. When the inner circle finishes the discussion the trainer asks for questions and comments from the outer one. In the end of the work the trainer asks the students to formulate conclusions after which proposes his own notes and comments.

This is an example of using oral reflective methods in teacher training for developing reflective skills and the origin of professional pedagogical reflection as one of the basic components of teachers' competency in the implementation of learner-centered approach.

However the majority of researchers point out that written reflection plays even more important role in the personal development of a student. From the analysis of theory and practice of reflective learning the following principles of written reflection were singled out which deserve attention:

- appreciation of research writing (it is important to support students in writing diaries, the stress should be on the skills to fix ideas for further reflection and discussion);
- appreciation of personal authorship (every one is an expert at least in a very narrow field of personal experience);
- appreciation of the process of writing (reading of perfect texts from textbooks should not discourage students, it is important to involve them into the process of creation and make them trust their own abilities);

- content should be more important than the form, the form should not limit the wish of students to express their thoughts in writing.

Here are several most widely used in the Russian system of teacher training forms of written reflection:

Essay (small in volume but describing concrete topic from a very personal perspective, compositionally free, making student to refer to his own experience); log – book (fixation of information with the help of key words, graphic forms, short sentences and conclusions, questions); different forms of diaries (regular, two-parts diary: one part represents observed facts and quotations, the other – comments; usually diary is kept for a long period of time which allows a student to follow the process and to reflect on it); written interview (variant of group reflection in the form of questions and answers, which allows to conduct written reflection aimed at the exchange of opinions in a very short period of time); poetical forms of reflection (way of creative reflection over studied concept or process); different variants of portfolio (representing a set of written tasks of a student put together in order to connect separate elements into a more general picture).

Here is an example of a portfolio content of a Herzen State Pedagogical University student (St.Petersburg, Russia) prepared during the pedagogical practice at school:

1. Description of a method used by a teacher.
2. Diary including the description of the lessons.
3. Essay on pupils.
4. Log-book containing the description of the observed or conducted lesson.
5. Plans of seminars on experimental work conducted at school.

6. Review of the references.
7. Formulation of further planning.

Portfolio could also include a set of lists for assessment, lists of observations, parts of diaries, log-books, video-recordings, project descriptions and plans for reports. So, in our understanding portfolio is more than just a set of student works, it is the well planned in advance selections of personal achievements which role in the process of implementation of the learner-centered approach is difficult to overestimate.

Another very effective example of development of reflective skills is the use of a pedagogical diary.

Pedagogical diary is used mainly during the period of pedagogical practice of students at school. But of course its educating potential is not limited only to this period. Practice is one of the forms of professional training of teachers at the universities. It allows to train students using their own experience as well as to integrate psychological, pedagogical, methodological and subject matter knowledge. Let's consider the method of using pedagogical diary during the period of pedagogical practice.

The main tasks for the period are:

- to develop initial pedagogical skills;
- to awake professional interest ;
- to organize research work;
- to develop skills for analysis and self-analysis of professional activity, investigation and summarizing of pedagogical experience.

The content of students work during this period could be described as:

- acquaintance with school, problems and perspectives of its development;
- psychological and pedagogical research of pupils and study process;
- planning of class-room activities, out-of-class activities, individual work with pupils;
- preparation and conduction of study process and out-of-school activities.

Keeping diary is not enough to develop necessary skills which allow students to carry out professional pedagogical reflection. It could be even non-effective if keeping diary is not organized according to a certain set of rules.

In order to turn diary-keeping into an educating process it is necessary to define what should be written down into it and how students can use it for the development of their professional competency.

Concerning the first issue: students put down into diaries their considerations about lessons, educational activity, interviews with teachers, pupils, parents. It is most important that they would make their own selection of pedagogical situations relevant for them. The general demand is to make the comments very concrete, describing the facts exactly and trying to avoid subjective opinions.

Analysis of the pedagogical situation should start only after the following questions received their answers:

“Teacher block”:

What was I aiming at?

What did I do?

What did I think of?

What did I feel?

“Pupils block”:

What did my pupils want?

What were their actions?

What did they think of?

What were their feelings?

The process of learning with the use of diary is structured as following:

1. (personal level) Describe the impressions of the day: what happened, what was essential.
2. (group level) Exchange your diaries with other students, read their remarks and discuss the impressions. Check the discrepancies.
3. (personal level) Describe your impressions.
4. (group level) Read your remarks, ask each other questions; discuss the necessity of making descriptions concrete.
5. (personal level) Describe your impressions.
6. (group level) Exchange your diaries, read the descriptions and make your remarks in the form: “I think that you did a very good analysis because....” or “I was surprised that you...”
7. (tasks for students) Next week you have to spend at least 15 minutes a day with your diary. After that a teacher takes the diaries and makes comments.
8. (group level) At this stage it is possible to arrange a discussion on the advantages diary-keeping offers.

9. Teacher expresses the comments concerning diary-keeping avoiding negative remarks and trying to make the comments as concrete as possible.
- 10.(task for students) Next week you have to describe three pedagogical situations with which you have problems.
- 11.Choose one of the described situations, suggest it for the group discussion. Analyze it with the help of the questions from the teachers' and pupils' blocks.
- 12.....

With the students' progress in personal and professional development, the tasks and possibilities of reflection should broaden. When students reach the level that allows them to analyze a problem using their theoretical knowledge and terminology, the time comes to analyze their personal processes of development. It could be arranged with the help of the following questions:

What did I want to learn?

How did I try to do it?

What educational aspects deserve mentioning?

How did I learn?

What were my feelings?

What helped me and what was on my way?

What disadvantages of the proposed method do I recognize?

What other way of learning could be proposed?

What decisions do I have to take concerning my further education?

A set of "reflective" questions is not strict of course. Other options could be added or chosen. But it should be kept in mind that the main task

of reflective questions is to stimulate the students' reflection over their own pedagogical experience.

The additional task while using this technique included also checking the progress in development of reflective skills. It was carried out by analysis of students' diaries, by checking their participation in discussions, noting their ability to define strong and weak points of their own pedagogical activity, analyzing self-assessment ability of students.

Analysis of diaries shows that step by step from the description of personal impressions students with the help of basic reflective questions turn to analysis of their own experience as well as from comments – to search of solutions.

However there are certain difficulties that should be noted:

- some students make very formal notes,
- some look for ready suggestions from the part of teacher,
- some are too much concentrated on themselves and do not notice pupils' activity,
- some tend to analyze pedagogical problems without working out ways for solutions.

One of the ways to overcome these difficulties is the organization of special seminars for students where the goals of diary-keeping are explained, the knowledge about reflective learning actualized, the advantages of work with diary are compared to traditional ways of pedagogical analysis.

In order to evaluate the use of this technique it is worthwhile to turn to some of the impressions of students who participated in the diary-keeping program. They point out that diary-keeping helps:

- to single out most important aspects of pedagogical activity;
- to be precise in describing the pedagogical situations;
- to put real goals for further work;
- to look for way out from trying situations;
- to overcome conflict situations with pupils and colleagues;
- to discuss pedagogical issues;
- to look for personal style of work.

The students comments prove that with the help of this technique it is possible to develop exactly the qualities of a teacher which make him ready to implement learner-centered approach.

Of course, it is difficult to make students perform written tasks. In order to make the process going a set of rules exists: written tasks have to be regular, the topic for writing has to be interesting, there should be successful examples available, the written tasks should be shared with other students, students have to develop the habit to correct their texts at any time necessary; help of fellow students should be available.

The above-mentioned techniques of oral and written reflective learning are used in teacher training usually as parts of a special element of study process.

Russian specialists believe that in teacher training three elements should be harmoniously linked: theoretical training at University; practical training at University and practical work in school. The integration of these elements resulting in formation of key educational competencies is realized on the basis of reflective approach with a help of such powerful means as pedagogical practicum.

In the Russian system of teacher training the development of professional competency of a future teacher is traditionally based on a vast theoretical background. Pedagogical practice then is supposed to perform a function of the process where students can apply their theoretical knowledge. However analysis of the pedagogical practice shows that the approach “from theory to practice” contains a number of problems due to the fact that students lack practical skills concerning the use of theoretical knowledge for solving practical tasks. There is still a gap between pedagogical theory and practice: students might have good knowledge of the subject they are supposed to teach, they might know theoretical principles of psychology, pedagogical science, methods of teaching, but they often do not know how to use them all to solve concrete problems put forward by their professional reality.

Consequently autonomous work on analysis, thinking over and putting together different aspects of knowledge in order to solve practical tasks becomes one of the main problems in the work of a student. In the process of transformation of formal knowledge into real one reflection plays the major role and reflective learning is used to stimulate the active research position of a student. However neither theoretical nor practical stage of teachers training can provide suitable conditions for the use of reflective technology to say nothing about the learning of reflective technology. The most effective in this sense is the intermediate element – pedagogical practicum, which allows to analyze both real and model pedagogical activity. Practicum is an important element in the development of professional competency of a teacher that precedes school practice and performs a linking function between theory and practice. Practicum is a system of learning seminars/workshops worked out both on content and methodological level for a study course of

applied character. The goal of practicum is to provide a future teacher with a system of necessary professional skills to enable him to perform pedagogical work successfully. The system involves organizational skills, communicative skills, research skills, etc. Special attention is paid to acquiring specific skills of communication with pupils, which would allow a student to express himself fully and freely but which would demonstrate acceptance and understanding of pupils irrespective of their psychological or social peculiarities in order to make the relations between a teacher and pupils sincere and open. It is especially important for Russia because the principles of respectful attitude to pupils are new for us and often meet active resistance from the part of teachers.

Practicum is structured so as to involve three levels of work with students: informational, personal and behavior; a lot of time is devoted to autonomous work of students and to discussion of their professional experience.

The structural elements of practicum are:

- discussion on the topic aiming at clarification of how psychological-pedagogical ideas could be realized in practical work;
- discussion of homework;
- exercises to acquire a skill;
- role play and analysis of problem situations;
- analysis of video materials;
- reflection on the process of learning.

So, it is clear that such an element of teacher training course as practicum allows the extensive use of reflective techniques which in their turn facilitate the achievement by the students of new professional level

of competency and construct a good basis for the implementation of learner-centered approach.

At present Russian specialists are working on theory of learner-centered approach, on the basis of which special study materials are developed for the system of teachers training. A whole range of techniques for practical implementation is also on the way. We managed not only to find the place for it within the framework of pedagogical practicum, but also trained the trainers who are capable of working with students according to this important and answering the demands of the present day educational technology. The positive results which students show encourage us to make further efforts in this direction. The combination of theoretical research and practical activity creates the conditions for successful implementation of learner-centered approach into the system of teachers training in Russia.

It should be noted that international cooperation plays really outstanding role in promotion of innovative ideas and developments. The possibility to get acquainted with works of specialists from the USA, the Netherlands, other countries and the conduction of a number of international cooperative projects enabled Russian specialists to enrich the field of their research and to structure clear perspectives for the innovative development of education in Russia.

I hope very much for new impulses which are sure to come from the Bangkok conference to make a new contribution to the worlds treasure of educational wisdom.

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