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Mediation in Educational Dynamics

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This article provides a theoretical assumption and then a fragment of its testing on the material of a concrete study. The main premise of the study is dependence of students' educational dynamics on the function of mediation, linking the dynamics of a student with the "cultural subject". In this case – orientation of students of the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy at their own education, becoming a psychologist, solving professional tasks in the Organizational-activity game (the OAG) as an institution of mediation. The hypotheses are as follows:

- *A change in the dynamics of educational relations is possible with the appearance of a new psychological objective, a new method of solving it.*
- *Emergence, testing and assimilating of a new way of solving a psychological problem is provided by special techniques and organization of the space of the game.*
- *Such an organization can be set in the OAG.*

The mechanism of development, which the OAG is based on – is a conflict. It is their behavior in a conflict, that shows what is being objectified by students – an educational objective or their feelings – I as a future professional or I as an "offended" party in this situation.

Keywords: mediation, constructive conflict, the Organizational-activity game, educational dynamics, activity approach.

There are several points of view regarding the concept of mediation. For example, there is a concept of mediation in social psychology [5] or mediating function in the cultural-historical concept and psychology of development [4, 9], both these concepts are categorically related, but differ by activity. These distinctions appear in connection with the areas, one is considering – politics, commerce or education, etc. Mediation occurs in a situation, where you immediate interaction is not possible – this is its essence. Let us consider the sphere of education to determine the function of mediation (carried out by a teacher-mediator) in development of educational

subject relations of students. To do this, let us first consider the educational relations themselves.

Educational relations

Educational relations was quite clearly schematized by L.S. Vygotskiy [see 8] as a process of translation of culture, in which specific cultural positions interact, and their activity is mediated by the social situation of development and by use of special (corresponding to cultural material) ways of transformation. They are learning and interiorizing of methods of cultural transformation, that constitute key characteristics of educational relations [8, p. 89]. Education does

not happen itself. As a cultural process it requires a special form and way of transmission.

A unit of educational relations is the system: a teacher, a student and a subject, connected by definite relations. These relations can develop as follows: first, there exist relations of a teacher and a student (in these relations personality-centered orientation prevails) and relations of a teacher and a subject as functional ones. The starting point of educational relations is perception of a subject as external, which a student does not possess but wishes to. In the course of development of educational relations there should appear the relation of a student-a subject, in which the way of working with subject is taken from the relations of a teacher- a subject.

Thus, there is a separation of personal and subject-orientation of educational relations and shifting the focus to a subject. Here we can register depersonification of:

- a subject, or rather a method of subject-transforming action (action-psychological aspect);
- a figure (position), change of the status of a teacher from a “master” to “conductor” (socio-psychological aspect).

For mediation to happen, that is, to succeed as a connection, depersonification in activity and socio-psychological aspects must take place.

Such process of transformation of relations can be and must be constructed. The mechanism of development is thought to be a productive conflict [6], which is conceived, specially designed and implemented.

It must be said that under the dynamics of educational relations we understand in this work not correspondence-- non-correspondence to standards, but advancement of a student in thinking, connected with claiming and learning professional ways of activity, as compared to their previous level. The object of assessment here is learning cultural tools, which, according

to the theory of L.S. Vygotskiy, is a guiding line of educational process [cited from 3]. It is best demonstrated in the model of individual progress. [3, p. 29]. According to the model, there are three levels in development of thinking and understanding. The levels reflect levels of mastering tools of subject transformation, and are the principal scheme, which is based in a particular case on the content of a particular subject. Level I. learning of the external pattern of subject transformation. Level II. Distinguishing (modeling) the essential relation of the subject system. Level III. Inclusion of the generalized method into the set of the resources of action, that can be accepted and rejected, modified and transformed.

In general, development of educational relations (especially in higher education) depends on actions, made by a student, and decisions that he/she takes. According to the conception of K. Lewin, a situation of decision-making is a conflict one. [10]. He writes that in psychological terms, a conflict is characterized as a situation in which an individual is simultaneously affected by opposite forces of equal strength. [10]. Thus, we obtain a scheme of unfolding of an action in the field with the influence of forces and decision-making.

In the terms of K. Lewin’s conception, a mechanism of developing of relations – a conflict – is described. To determine the content of this conflict – the material on the unfolding takes place, we consider a five-factor model of conflict [7, p. 38]. This model defines a number of stable factors that take into account the material, the nature of interaction, the specifics of the parties, the dynamics of unfolding and thus objectivizes conflict interaction. 1. The subject of the conflict is the status in hierarchic system of relations. 2. The object of the conflict is the indicator of identity, belonging. 3. The object of conflict is acquired (internalized) gap in some external subject material. 4. The object of conflict

is the sense of self-worth. 5. The conflict situation appears as a consequence of lack of success, of failure to reach the intended result, or as an anticipation of such failure [7].

If we analyze actions in a situation according to this model, the general strategy of behavior it becomes clear, its causes and reasons, and, therefore, in this case, it (behavior) can be controlled: it can be given dynamics and guided. In fact, it is becoming quite clear what we are dealing with and how to work with it, but still so far it is only a supposition

So, based on the analysis of the sources on the subject of our work, we can summarize these materials in the scheme (see Fig. 1), where a model of development is acquisition of the degrees of freedom in learning the way to solve a problem, a mechanism of development – a conflict, and the content of the conflict – objectivity, outlined in the five-factor model of conflict.

Mediation in educational relations

The educational system is literally “built-in between” creators of culture and consumers of culture. According to the plan, it should unite, connect the former with the latter, however, in practice, it separates them and becomes an independent production and self-sufficient structure. The tasks of mediation are not meaningful in terms of the subject matter of the activities of the parties (the focus of content is not specified), but they are meaningful in terms of the teaching object. “A mediator is the one who expresses the way of initiation of a “reverse” search and treatment. An adult (a teacher or a parent) is a mediator only to the degree in which he/she is looking for, testing (initially it is an adult, but not a child who does it) the situation, in which his/her adult’s idea itself, i.e. what he/she imagines and expresses (but not their “personal characteristics”) becomes an object of children’s

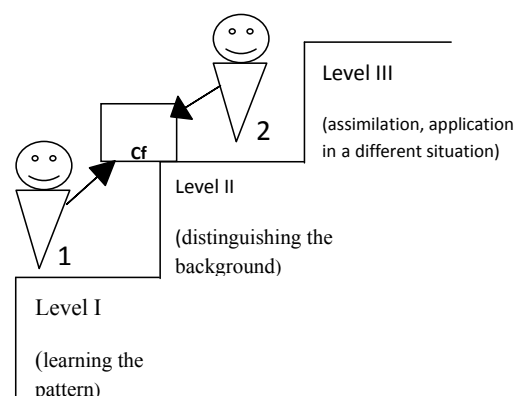


Fig. 1. The scheme of educational relations where 1 – a student; 2 – an intermediary acting as the ideal form for the student

interest and testing. The problem of mediation is set by non-coordination, non-relatedness of two positions (real (present situation) and ideal (way of seeing this situation)), and the task is to find something that will connect them and change into one another” [9, p. 62]. That is, when an intermediary initiates an action, at this time he acts himself, in this way showing by his/her own example and reflecting attempts of acting of those, who his activity is aimed at.

One of these institutions of mediation is the Organizational-activity game (the OAG), which is studied in this work. The OAG links “pure” idealizations, communication which exists “here and now” (which is not subject to the laws of logic at all), past activities and people themselves – in their personal, spiritual, social- psychological dimensions – into a single, but preserving its complexity polysystem, that becomes the springboard for the development of research of systems of people’s thinking and developing. [2, p. 389]. That is a new vision of a situation and their capabilities of acting in it open for them. An act of development takes place in which the game is directly involved: it works as an intermediary mechanism.

A lot of games (in their scenario or independent line of development) are aimed

at improving existing structures of activities (mainly institutional). In such games, participants do not radically revise their status as socio-cultural subjects, but only recognize it more clearly. Such are the games, conducted with students. Usually in these games standard social roles are played and considered, such as a professional role, job position, and suchlike. The starting point of the game is problem statement, which is initiated by acute conflicts in current activities of participants, inability to efficiently solve the problems they are facing. The main products of the games, aimed at improving of activities, are a problem-analytical picture of the existing situation and a project for its change, which removes the identified difficulties and conflicts for the sake of realizing certain tasks and socio-cultural values.

The studied case

The subject in educational relation is an educational task regarding one's own "psychological" education. Dynamics of attitude to one's own professional development is manifested in formation of professional thinking, that is, a change of ways to solve a problem. And, hence, the hypotheses of this paper are:

A change of ways to solve an educational task (dynamics of relations) becomes possible when viewing the situation by students changes according to the scheme:

- a new type of viewing the situation on is launched on the material of a new educational objective;
- space for trying, manipulation;
- internalizing through reflection;
- a new type of vision as one's own;

In this scheme the idea of L.S. Vygotskiy can be traced, according to which a final formation of ability happens through diverse use of an interiorized form of action and has as its final result a new, now culturally-based spontaneity.

[1] In the course of trying and manipulating, the skill is assimilated and interiorized, so it becomes "natural" in use and "cultural" in origin.

The points of this scheme can be provided in the OAG.

Thus, we can make the following conclusions:

- The change in the dynamics of educational relations is possible with the appearance of a new psychological objective, a new method of solving it.
- The emergence, testing and assimilating of a new way of solving a psychological problem is provided by special techniques and organization of the space of the game.
- Such an organization can be set in the OAG.

Basing on the hypotheses, we get the following scheme to test them: the means for dynamics of educational relations can be provided in the OAG, the organizers of the OAG for students determine the structure of the game and include special techniques. That is actually a scheme of educational co-existence: meeting of certain potential (of the students, participating in the game) and organized (of the organizers-game technicians) educational directions, leading to a change of way of seeing the situation (change in dynamics).

The study was conducted in several stages, it compares the data of the two games. After the first game it was planned to identify a change in the orientation of students towards education, for them to have claims for independence in the professional sphere. From the next year's continuation of the game it was necessary to obtain first of all, confirmation of such an effect the game, and secondly, to identify the intermediary function in the game (consciously carried out by the organizers), and thirdly, to fixate the postgame effect as matching of actions

of an intermediary and the situation, in which he/she acted.

The study was conducted in several stages: 1) conducting the Organizational-activity games with the first-year students of the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogic, 2) measuring the postgame effect, and 3) assessing the provision of a mediatory function in the game. The first stage is the most interesting and significant, the next two are complementary and supported the data, obtained in the first. At the first stage, the dynamics of educational orientation was traced, if there appeared one. The main method to detect it was reflexive reports of students, fixating changes during the game. The participants were offered a form to fill out, which was based on the projective material. It was assumed that educational orientation will manifest itself in it during its actualization in the game (if students already have it in a potential form).

Referring to the data, obtained on the results of the first game (see Fig. 2), it can be noted that the greatest focus on the subject (III factor) is fixated during the second day. 19 % of the students demonstrate subject orientation when

asked a question, aimed at overcoming obstacles (in response to the game's problem setting). In addition to this, data about self-estimation (IV factor) increase during the second day from 10 % with reference to objectives to 28 % during the second.

Thus, we can conclude that in response to the organized problems students either demonstrate defensive reaction (which is evidenced by the increase in Factor VI), which is the case with the majority, or beget an orientation at overcoming, i.e. educational orientation is activated.

Analyzing the data of postgame reflexive reports of the second game, which took place a year later (see Fig. 3), we can see that 78 % of students consider the game as a usual educational situation, maintaining status relations with teachers. However, towards the end of the game this orientation decreases by 47 %.

The data of the second day are quite interesting, where an increase in Factors II, III and VI can be seen (14, 12 and 16 %, respectively) – this is the reaction of students to the problems, set by the organizers. After the first game, there was an increase only in Factors III and IV, which may be indicative of group solidarity against



Fig. 2. The dynamics of educational orientation of participants of the game

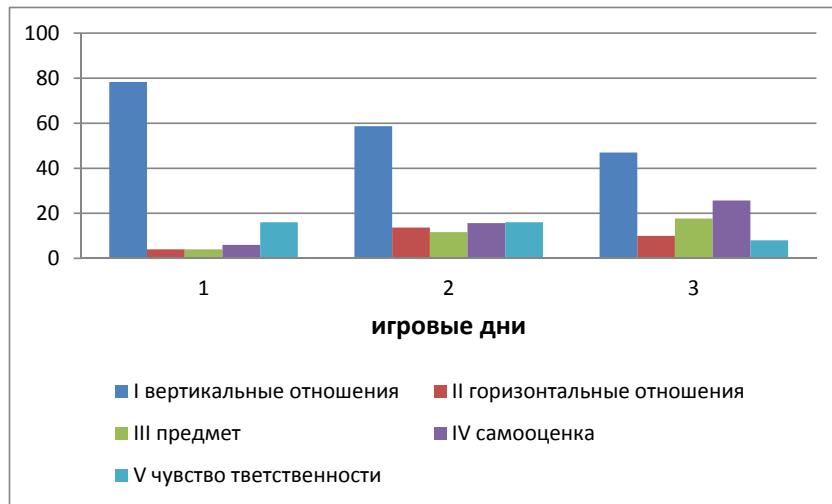


Fig. 3. The dynamics of educational orientation of participants of the game a year later

difficulties, or productive collective nature of overcoming difficulties. The choice of a cause for group solidarity now depends on: whether it is a protective reaction (Factor IV) or activation of educational orientation (Factor III).

In general, the data of both years demonstrate dynamics and activation of educational orientation in the course of the game and by the final day (14 % – 2009 18 % – 2010). Basing on which we can make a conclusion about certain stability of the results and effectiveness of the games as a form of mediating action.

The mediating function, considered on the material the game, works for students of psychology through its discovery, and the activities of the organizers for its presentation to students are adequate to the situation. However, we can speak of only a partial proof of the theoretical hypotheses, which were made, because the game is only one of the places for realization of the intermediary function in education, it is certainly worthy of special consideration, but does not provide exhaustive answers to the posed questions.

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Посредничество в образовательной динамике

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В данной статье приводится теоретическое предположение и далее фрагмент его проверки на материале одного конкретного исследования. Основным посылом в работе является зависимость образовательной динамики учащегося от функции посредничества, связывающей динамику этого учащегося с «культурным предметом». В данном случае – направленность студента психолого-педагогического факультета на собственное образование, становление себя психологом, решающим профессиональные задачи, через организационно-деятельностную игру (ОДИ) как институт посредничества. Гипотезы заключаются в следующем:

- изменение в динамике учебно-предметных отношений возможно при появлении новой психологической задачи, нового способа ее решения;*
- возникновение, апробация и присвоение нового способа решения психологической задачи обеспечивается специальными техниками и устройством пространства;*
- такая организация может быть задана в ОДИ.*

Механизмом развития, который закладывается в ОДИ еще на этапе ее проектирования, является конфликт. Именно поведение в конфликте показывает, что учащимся предметизируется – образовательная задача или самочувствие – я как будущий профессионал или я как ситуативно «обиженный».

Ключевые слова: посредничество, конструктивный конфликт, организационно-деятельностная игра, образовательная динамика, деятельностный подход.
