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THE HUMANIZATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING

SUMMARY. This paper covers the problems of distance learning as a form of educational activity, and technological and content aspects of the humanization of distance learning are considered. The benefits and risks of distance learning are addressed.

KEY WORDS. Humanization of education, distance learning, educational objectives.

Modern people get education via the increasing influence of information and communication technologies. Progress and self-development of a person in the information environment may seem as a form of activity without borders and limits. Being the result of the information influence on education distance learning has now become a universal means of an open and continuous educational process.

In order to understand the essence of the concept *"distance learning"* we are going to give an example and analyze some definitions. Distance learning is:

— the technology of purposeful and methodically organized management of educational and cognitive activity of the learners living at a distance from the educational center. [1, p. 72];

— a way of organizing the learning process with the use of educational environment based on modern information and telecommunication technologies, which make it possible to carry out training at a distance without the direct contact of learners with their teachers. [2, p. 137];

— an interactive relationship both between a teacher and a learner, and an interactive source of information, which reflects all components inherent in the education process and is carried out in the conditions of realization of the possibilities of information and communication technologies [3, p. 12];

— a form of education similar to full-time education, when the best traditional and innovative techniques, means and forms based on computer and telecommunication technologies are used in the education process [4, p. 58].

So, distance learning is defined as the process of interaction, a technology of educational administration, a learning technology, a method of educational process' organization, and a form of education. We assume that *distance learning should be classified as one of the forms of educational process*. To support this point of view, we quote the words of V.I. Zagvyazinsky [5, p. 113] and A.M. Novikov [6, p. 125] who tried to define the place of distance learning in the modern concept of education

and compare it to correspondence and full-time training. According to E.S. Polat distance learning can be considered as a new way of training and a component of non-stop education [7].

The definitions given above included such connecting words as *distance* and *information communication technologies.* Therefore, the possibility to teach students at distance by means of computer and telecommunication is traditionally considered the main distinctive feature of distance learning. But the distance between the subjects of educational activity (a teacher and pupils, a teacher and students) is measured not only by time and space. Unfortunately, sometimes students don't understand their teacher in one and the same classroom, because of communication barriers, an inadequate style of teaching, speech shortcomings, prevalence of frontal and group forms of organization of educational process, lack of effective means of presentation, etc. Distance learning is intended to overcome hermeneutical "distance" between the professor and the learners [8, p. 178], to open free access to knowledge, to make the environment of educational group interaction democratic, to provide support of self-training, and to individualize control, etc.

In distance learning communicative training methods of providing active interaction of subjects (in the form of a dialogue or a forum) are used. Modern computer means and web technologies help to realize effective types of communication of a teacher with students with the help of all the channels of perception. For example, during a Skype-lecture it's possible for a teacher to show (using the option "screen demonstration") and to comment on the slides in an oral and written form (through the option "to send a message"). Many more possibilities can be provided with the help of webinars: presentations and audio and video broadcasting in real time, organization of web tours (giving URLs, pages, data etc. to other participants for visual training with the elements of logins, clicks, transitions between screens, etc.), broadcasting records (for subsequent viewing and listening by any user),whiteboard (an electronic board for comments on which the lecturer and listeners can make notes or comments on the presentation slides), text chats (group, private), voting and polls, remote desktop and sharing additional information. In such a way, the members of webinars can choose instruments of communication depending on the individual communicative abilities and develop self-learning skills.

Distance learning provides efficiency to the training process due to the redistribution of time in favor of active forms of training and increasing the amount of self-learning work. For example, Buryatiya State University uses distance learning, also. The following curriculum for students has been created: online and offline-video lectures make up 30%, online seminars make up 40% and independent work in network courses make up 30%. Within such a curriculum the functions of the teacher changes, because of distance learning. It is necessary for a teacher to develop a network training course, to prepare the content of online-offline lectures, to think over the script of online-seminars, to regularly supervise the independent work of students, to analyze tests, to assess individual assignments, to make comments on mistakes, etc.). However, all this work is not enough to solve modern education problems. What are these problems?

The educational task is an integrative term, some kind of a "section" of educational practice which structures the educational environment, operates educational events [9], and is the backbone component of educational activity. To define the component of modern educational activity, it is necessary to characterize the modern educational situation.

As the academician V. Zagvyazinsky notes, in modern education the signs of a crisis state are observed. Let's list these signs: violation of continuity between the education system stages, insufficient financing of education, "personnel staff shortage" in science and education establishments, etc. To overcome this crisis, it is necessary to increase the humanistic potential of education and make it active , to realize the main goal of education—the development of human potential , the formation of an awar—creative personality [10]. In the context of global information, the problem of humanization consists in humanizing the electronic environment [11]. Therefore the search of technologies directed to the development and effective use of human possibilities in a virtual environment seems to be an actual trend of modern scientific and pedagogical techniques. This educational task sounds like the idea of "human revolution" [A. Pachchei], the transformation of a person into an "ecological person"—comprehensively developed, well-educated and moral. Thus, we are coming nearer to the primary sense of education: education is humanization; for only via this process does a person become a personality [12, p. 13]. Education assumes the development of cultural heritage and personality individualization [13, p. 156] and the development of a creative, cognitive and communicative person [1, p. 36] on the basis of human approaches. For this purpose the educational process should become flexible, focused on the specifics of the student's development. As for distance learning, it is actually flexible: the same content of an online course can be used for traditional or correspondence education; it can also be used for students of various levels of knowledge and learning ability, in individual and/or group training. For example, in Moodle's system the author-developers of the program can constantly supplement and improve training materials, correct operatively not only errors and mistakes, but also the methodical structure of the courses. Recently, teacher-designers began to pay attention to pedagogical design of online courses. It is clear that the multimedia technology of distance training creates psychological conditions promoting better perception and storing information with the involvement of subconscious reactions of the trainee. Interactive graphics influence the development of intuitive, figurative thinking; computer technologies change and expand the way we give educational information, and make perceptions of the material aesthetic [14, p. 48].

The humanization of education suggests the solution of the problem of humanistic consciousness development in a dialogue, interaction and cooperation of the subjects of educational process, in the learner's creation of his own "image of the world" and their personal culture display [15, p. 10]. The high interactivity of distance learning allows us to solve this problem: participation in virtual learning courses gives the possibility of various and intensive dialogue communication. Let us take young

teachers—tutors of Buryatiya State University for example. They use chat-seminars quite often and consider them as an effective form of online knowledge testing. It has become evident that in order to lead an online lesson and to "to feel the audience", the teachers try to use lecture-conversations, lecture-dialogues; they use various ways of feedback (remarks, forms of appeal, questions, etc.).

We have described the technological aspects of the humanization of distance learning. The interdisciplinary approach to the content of knowledge and subjects integration make the mechanism of humanization of education [16, p. 84].The creation of online educational and teaching system is practiced in distance learning [17]. It includes methodical teaching technique recommendations concerning the performance of practical work, tasks for independent student learning, tests for control and self-control, bibliography and Internet resources, and an electronic course of lectures. We consider that interdisciplinary courses are the means of teaching within the terms of introduction of Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education (FSES HPE) of the third generation. Competences are the main purpose of this standard. An interdisciplinary approach in education should occupy a special place in forming a set of abilities to apply knowledge, skills and personal qualities for successful, professional activity.

In conclusion, we've indicated educational problems which should be resolved for further humanization of distance learning:

— paying special attention to the individual peculiarities of the learners and the teaching staff in organization of virtual communications;

— active introduction of dialogue forms of communication during online classes;

— development of the online interdisciplinary courses.

These three tasks can't completely solve the problem of humanization of distance learning. It is necessary to further comprehend the risks of modern (real and virtual) education process which often lacks the experience of emotional and evaluative relation to life, to people around us and to ourselves [18]. People continue to be distanced from each other more and more, they lose the experience of communication. Here is a clear example: "An acquaintance of mine once boasted that he was keeping in touch with his son by e-mail ... The letter (from the son) consisted of one quotation" [8, p. 36]. What does it mean? Is it a new form of expression of human feelings or the father and the son have nothing to tell each other?!

Another (not less moral) problem is connected with disappearance of book culture: a person starts changing, losing his freedom. The control over people's behavior is increasing and a person becomes more and more subject to manipulation [19]. Also there is a problem of computer addiction when people prefer virtual acquaintances to live communication, and they isolate themselves from human society. What should be done? It is necessary to humanize, recover relationships of people, and first of all it should be done in the educational process. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a model focused on humanistic distance learning based on interdisciplinary courses of worldwide orientation, pedagogical techniques and methods developing the emotional

field of a personality, creating conditions for dialogue and cooperation between teachers and students who are divided not only by time and distance, but also by cultural and psychological distinctions. Only then, it will be possible to project the educational process as a model of incomplete and continuous pedagogical relations in distance learning ... [20, p. 199] and as the image of life activity in saturated virtual environment.

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