

# **PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**

© E. G. BELYAKOVA

Dr. Pedagog. Sci., Professor, Department of General and Social Psychology,  
Institute of Psychology and Pedagogics, Tyumen State University

*b-evgenia@yandex.ru*

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## ***MODELS OF PERSONAL MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS\****

From the positions of value-semantic approach, psychology of meaning and pedagogical hermeneutics personal meaningful experience can be regarded as a way of understanding the world and oneself in the world which an individual acquires in the process of reality comprehension. This is a special “language”, which allows people to build a coherent and holistic conception of their personality, to interpret and transform their own identity. [1]

The ways of crystallization of the personal meaningful experience in the consciousness are represented by a number of increasing complex forms: autobiographical story about a single emotionally saturated episode; an important remembrance; a generalized existential theme that unites a set of memories; a thought through life story; integrated to the maximum generalization of the personal meaningful experience through the creation of a concept of their own destiny (after V.V. Nurkova) [2]. They combine human worldview and characteristic features of one’s personality. They concentrate life meaning position of an individual, his ideas about life prospects, needs, goals, values, so - all that gives life the quality of meaningfulness. Meaningful experience is in constant development - as people change their resources and take a new position in the world, the transformation of their meaningful experience, correlated with their identity crises, takes place.

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In the humanities the concept of “experience” is used in different meanings, such as individual and socio-cultural, empirical and theoretical, scientific and everyday, unconscious, instinctive and reflective, existential, phenomenological, mental, subjective, learned methods of action (including those meant to create something new), knowledge, assessment and values, the content of memory, competence, personal maturity and etc. At the same time the experience is almost always considered by various researchers as a holistic, integrative and included in the nuclear personal structure [3, 4]. The ideas of person- activity approach (A.N. Leontiev, S. Rubinstein, D.A. Leontiev) about the semantic determination of activity and behavior, V.P. Zinchenko’s concepts of “human movement” and “living knowledge”, pedagogical approaches, where the concept of “experience” underlies the content of education (M.N. Skatkin, I.J. Lerner, V. Krajewski), they do not allow to draw a sharp demarcation line between “projections” of meaning - its subject- gnostic (meaning viewed as meaningful understanding of something), affective- evaluative (meaning viewed as an experience value, subjective importance, evaluation, attitude) and objective-practical (meaning viewed as an action aimed at transforming the problem situation, as an act of expressing personal choice) parts. Meaningful experience of an individual considered in relation to a holistic experience is a substantial generalization of knowledge, assessment and ways of life, integrated on the value-semantic basis.

Experience and meaning are linked with their purposeful role in human life. The etymology of the concept “experience” indicates that it is referred to the past (Dahl’s dictionary offers the following definitions “to experience (v) – to elicit” -to interview, to examine, to test, to try, to learn the meaning, to tempt; experience (n) - a test, a trial, a probation, an attempt, experienced (adj.) – an expert, wise, knowledgeable and capable, who lived a lot, saw a lot, did a lot – an expert not only in words but also in deeds), as well as to the present and the future. In the design of the holistic experience meaning-making plays a significant role which allows to structure, synthesize this experience, assign it in the form of personal knowledge and rely on it in a new activity (Leibniz’s philosophy, I.F. Herbart’s German associationism and W. Wundt’s psychology used a special term “apperception” to describe this phenomenon). In positivism experience is considered as the necessary way of verification of theoretical hypotheses. In the philosophy of pragmatism and experimentalism (William James, John Dewey) experience, in fact, is a way of life through the active interaction with the world, during which a person feels the need to understand the nature of things and to check its truth. In domestic pedagogy the ideas of personal self-discovery in one’s life were developed by N.S. Shatsky.

A number of studies highlighted the projective character of human experience meaningful for one’s individual destiny and culture in general. In John Dewey’s educational philosophy [5] meaningful experience sets both the life course of an individual and one’s social and cultural development. Experience is a movement to something new, unknown, it is focused on the future and it forestalls activity. Even so, experience is not seen as exclusively intrapsychic, subjective state, but, on the

contrary, it is understood as a part of the objective conditions for an action, which is based on internal assumptions. John Dewey's concept about experience correlates with K. Lewin's ideas of life world of an individual as a "continuation" of one's inner world, and with F.V. Vasilyuk's vital ontology and his typology of life-worlds, different in the ways an individual copes with critical situations and the methods of ensuing behavioral models [6]. We should also note the role of social constructionism to emphasize the meaningful projective beginning of the experience. In this perspective, experience is interpreted as a probable model of the world, which is verified by further "experimentation". Meaningful, reflective experience grants a person freedom to construct a worldview, to choose interpretation methods and explanation of phenomena, events and situations, to set important goals. It is also the basis for the formation (maintenance or transformation) of behavioral models and preferences of specific actions for achieving goals.

Thus, although meaningful experience of an individual seems to be presented only subjectively and phenomenologically, it nevertheless expresses the link between a man and the objective reality and it is an active factor for the upcoming activity of the subject, "materialized" in the form of actions and deeds. Any action, being a structural unit of activity in the socio-cultural context, is performed more or less contentiously, at least - at the level of experience of one's own significance for a subject, reflected in the personal meaning. On the other hand, meaningful experience induces the commission of targeted actions; it encourages a person for their search, construction and incorporation into the holistic vital functions.

The above expressed assertions raise a question of the role of meaningful experience and regularities of its formation in the modern education. Tradition of person-centered education presupposes the creation of conditions for developing and enriching the subject experience of a student and the development of his/her personality. In the context of the discussed issues V.V. Serikov's ideas are very important. The scholar writes about the necessity of redirecting education towards the development of personal experience of the students, when «just as a person in the educational process acquires the experience of using knowledge, ways of cognitive and practical problems solving, creative experience, one must also learn an experience of «being a person», i.e. experience in the implementation of specific personality functions (selectivity, reflection, self-determination, self-realization, social responsibility and others» [7; 32]. In this case, learning is subjectively significant, filled with meaning and relies on the intrapersonal driving forces of development.

Competence approach, widely introduced at different levels of the modern national education, provides the construction of educational content on the basis of the subjective experience of learners. The structure of competence contains various types of experience, integrated on the value-semantic basis (V.I. Zagvyazinsky). For example, according to I.A. Zimnyaya, competence is comprised of readiness to act, possession of knowledge about a profession, the experience of accumulated potential implementation in the various standard and non-standard situations, attitude to the activity content and its results, emotional and volitional regulation of the process and

the result of the competence [8]. At the same time, the competence-based approach lacks for methodology to specify the ways and means of learners' meaningful experience formation and development. Formation of skills and abilities is more emphasized nowadays, as the level of its integration in the meaningful domain of personality is not yet thoroughly studied.

The theoretical aspects and practical work with the meaningful experience are presented in A.S. Belkin's vital education. Its independent pedagogical task is to reunite subject and subjective experience of a learner with the system of scientific knowledge, to enrich and develop it [9]. Developing A.S. Belkin's ideas, N.O. Verbitskaya notes that the conditions for a combination of acquired knowledge and life experience to create a new kind of experience are, in fact, generalized requirements for the content of adult education [10]. This content should have valuable meaning for an individual, social meaningful significance and be constructive, to help design the future, include the experience of previous generations, and be continuously enriched and developed.

For the development of personal meaningful experience, an andragogic learning model is of special interest. S.I. Zmeev defines its peculiarity, in comparison to "pedagogical model", as follows: adult students have rather big life (domestic, social and professional) experience; a learner is an active participant in the learning process, participates in the organization of education, particularly, in defining its content, methods and forms. Experience can be used as a source of education for both a student and his group mates, adult learners' willingness to learn is defined by their need to study something to be able to deal with specific life problems, and they want to apply their knowledge and skills immediately, just now, to become more competent and efficient in real-world situations.

Therefore, on the one hand, education should be focused on specific, vital goals of students, on the performance of social roles or enhancement of the personality, on the other hand – it should be "contextual" (A.A. Verbitsky), taking into account professional, social and domestic activities of students and their spatial-temporal and substantive conditions [11].

I.A. Kolesnikova connects social-andragogic specificity of adult learning with an individual need of constant updating of knowledge and skills, as adults constantly have problems in their life and the need to cope with these problems actually motivate them to learn. She also notes that education solves a meaningful task of a person's self-determination in the modern world: "the ability to understand and preserve one's self in a changing world is seen as one of the main tasks of life that cannot be fulfilled without lifelong learning" [12; 43].

A number of foreign models within so-called "empirical learning", which is widely used in adult education and recently in corporate training (D. Kolb, P. Mezirov, J. Freire, M. Nolz, P. Jarvis), are founded on the idea of enriching experience, gained in real situations, which is converted into knowledge, skills and attitudes, and contains various combinations of feelings, thinking, abstract ideas or behavior in specific situations. Formation of experience depends on the personal characteristics of the

stock of knowledge and social-cultural environment in which it is adopted [13, 14, 15]. According to P. Jarvis, the perceived content of social situations is transformed cognitively, emotionally or practically (in any combination) and integrated into the biography of an individual, embodied (resulting) in constant change (increment or experience) of the personality.

D. Kolb's popular adult education model of learning and acquisition of new information includes four stages of experience conversion. First, students get specific experience that they observe and reflect from different perspectives. The results of observation are used for abstract conceptualization and creation of generalizations or principles that unite observation in a theory, introduce new information in the existing knowledge and establish connection between them. Students use obtained generalizations as a guide for further action (active experiment) that allows them to get new experience and moves learning to a more advanced level. At this stage, students make their own plans of how to apply acquired knowledge. P. Mezirov and J. Freire emphasize the key role of experience for the development of critical thinking that is meant to free an individual from social, cultural and psychological bias used to have an impact on the way people perceive themselves and build their life. They use the term «transformative learning», which, according to J. Freire, ensures the development of critical consciousness of students through experiential encounter with the realities of culture.

In empirical learning, methods to update existing experience and to create a new one are used. These methods include role-play, case studies, critical incident technique, modeling, social drama, group discussions, and the method of «values clarification». They allow to play through social cultural scenarios, to experiment with new behavior and to get feedback in a safe environment.

We have identified some characteristic psychological-pedagogical conditions for the development of personal meaningful experience in the process of implementation of andragogical learning model in a social educational program “University of the Third Age” at the Tyumen State University (2005-2008). In this case, the experience of students was a necessary prerequisite for learning and determined its meaningful orientation. The study involved more than 30 lecturers of Tyumen State University and 350 students aged 56 to 80 years. In developing the content and the form of the educational process the survey results and psychological testing were taken into account, which showed that the main motives of elderly people to participate in educational programs were the need for social contact, improving of self-esteem and respect from others, maintaining health (physical and psychological) and implementation of their possibilities in the social cultural environment.

In accordance with the identified educational needs, the program was aimed at optimizing the social and psychological adaptation of elderly people, and its objectives included expansion of the psychological- pedagogical knowledge of the learners, their awareness of relevant areas of modern life (the greatest interest was aroused by modern information and communication technologies), the development of generic skills to

help adapt to the modern world and to solve problems in important situations, the formation of social- psychological competence, updating personal resources, psychological assistance in finding new positive life meanings. Taking into account specificity of the learners (elderly people) they implemented the strategy of psychological help through a number of conditions: ensuring minimum theoretical basis for practical work in a group, creating favorable background for getting positive emotional-axiological experience and obtaining new personal constructive experience; relying on the existing experience, creating conditions for the exchange of experience and display of positive personality traits. The program included a number of psychological and pedagogical disciplines (“Consulting and training in life skills,” “Correctional advisory assistance to the family,” “Problem Child”, “Communication training”), and the course “Fundamentals of information culture”. Students had an opportunity to choose the disciplines they were interested in, based on their interests and preferences. During the lessons referring to students’ life and work experience was an important condition for their inclusion in the work. In learning, the emphasis was put on the analysis of problem situations, their understanding from the standpoint of the modern theoretical knowledge, formation skills and abilities to resolve them. At the beginning of each session the learners determined the most important issues, which set the direction for the future work in the group. Educational interaction occurred in the dialogue while using active learning methods and various forms of joint creative work. To develop meaningful experience, special conditions were created for the students of the course where they could think about their basic personal values, attitudes, motives, and try to transform them during the development of new means of interaction with the social environment and productive ways of self-realization in the society.

The course “Counseling and training in life skills” was targeted at the students with an active social position, who strive to make the most of their own intellectual and personal resources, life, professional and personal experience in the modern society. It introduced the technologies of image-making, employment, time management, emotional self-regulation and promotion of personal potential, the formation of productive ways of interpersonal interaction. The learners of the course “Advisory-correctional assistance to the family” got acquainted with the modern theoretical concepts of family psychology, the laws of its operation and development. During practical classes and workshops they tested the technologies of implementing positive experience of family relationships, developing an ability to find alternative solutions to various problems, developing new models of constructive behavior in situations of family interaction. The course “Problem Child” was aimed at the formation of the humanistic parental position; the development of skills to understand child individuality and child problems at different stages of maturation; acquaintance with approaches and technologies of creating conditions for the harmonious psychosocial development of a child in the family environment. During the individual consultations, the students could get advice how to help a particular child with the problems of interpersonal relationships within the family and among peers, the

problems of school adaptation, difficulties in learning and education. The course "Training of communication" was aimed at the formation of social- psychological competence, skills, confident behavior and optimal coping strategies. The course "Basics of information culture" allowed to extend the living space of elderly people with the help of the modern information and communication technologies. The students mastered the technology of on-line utilities payments and free on-line medical consultations, they got access to Internet information resources (electronic libraries, blogs), means of communication (e-mail, social networks, chat rooms, forums).

The results of the summative diagnostics through the semantic differential technique showed that on the final stage of participation in social education program the learners expanded their scope of meaningful self-realization significantly. The participants' written feedback showed positive changes in their axiological-semantic field. Here are the extracts from the participants' essays. L.P. Litvyakova writes: "What did I get from these lessons? Firstly, they helped change some attitudes to life. Secondly, they helped find some positive things in the negative ones. Thirdly, they helped change the relationship with my children and grandchildren. Fourthly, they helped understand that people could have their own opinion, and you had to consider it. Fifthly, they helped be tolerant and confident in my life!" T.V. Kayukova writes: "On behalf of the group I want to express deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks for the knowledge, for the psychological and life experience that you have given us. You have taught us to be steadfast, courageous, to be ourselves, to feel needed, to overcome difficulties, to resist melancholy and loneliness". In general, the participants of the social educational project "University of the Third Age" emphasized their self-development, learning, active social position, communication, creativity, and mutual help and support.

We believe that the theoretical analysis and implementation experience of the andragogical model can identify important conditions for the development of meaningful learning experience of a person which can be required in school, professional and further education. These include:

- Creation of motivation to learn through the study of educational needs;
- Involvement of students in the learning organization process;
- Design of meaningful perspectives of personality development in which the objective content of learning is included as a condition and means to achieve these goals;
- Creation of conditions for self-realization and the formation of various aspects of students' experience in the broad sense - knowledge, attitudes, actions and behavior, setting and solving problems, creativity;
- Meaningful generalization and integration into the meaningful domain of the individual experience through new narrative forms;
- "Effectiveness" of acquired knowledge, its relevance to the solution of specific life goals and objectives.

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