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FEATURES OF DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' SUBJECT POSITIONS IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY DESIGN

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Abstract. The concepts "subject", "subjectivity" and "subject position" as well as characteristics of the subject are considered. Stages of subjectivity development in education and features of students' subject positions in design are analyzed. Design types in educational practice are singled out.
Keywords: design; educational activity; educational design; subject; subjectivity; subject position.

In the age of social reformation a person's ability to manage and construct social practices becomes particularly important. This ability characterizes a person as a subject of social practice and designing activity and gives an idea of design as a means of human influence on social reality, a person's foundation and education in the process of constructing social practice. In design research precedence is taken by such design participants' subjectivity characteristics as the ability to influence education through constructing its ideal image and activity based on its achievement. In competency-based learning design is viewed as a condition of forming a competence of a subject of education by means of organizing the reflection of goals, contents and results of education activity participants in the process of working on a project. However, the educational design studies nowadays do not specify the task of setting a subject position of design participants as a special educational result.

Modern researchers treat the notions "subject", subjectivity" and "subjective position" in the context of psychological, pedagogical and philosophical problems. In psychology the notions "subject" and subjectivity" are singled out. The notion "subject" originally came into common use in German classical philosophy where it was connected with the evolutional idea of its emergence and transformations in the course of matter development, when the subject was active and partial towards the object [1: 137]. The content of the term "subject" (its psychological meaning) includes the "active beginning of a person in his life, when he or she is viewed not a "passive" being dependent on external conditions and situation requirements but as an author, initiator and director of his activity, who is able to master the surrounding conditions and the requirements posed by the environment" [2: 140].

In A. Brushlinsky's works this category is also associated with "the highest degree of the manifestations of a person's psychological characteristics, his initiating his own actions, his active creative self-expression" [3: 94].

A subject is a qualitatively defined way of self-organization and self-regulation of an individual, a means of coordinating external and internal conditions of carrying out an activity in time, a center of coordinating all psychological processes, states, features, as well as capabilities, abilities and limitations of an individual towards objective and subjective goals, pretentions and tasks of an activity" [4: 284].

Along with the notion "subject", Russian psychologists deal with the notion of "subjectivity". It is used in psychology to refer to "the ability of a person to be a subject of this or that activity, including his own life". Subjectivity is "a special feature of a person (an individual) which characterizes their ability to organize and carry out an activity. The more expressed are the activity and independence of a person (as compared to circumstances), the more expressed is this subjectivity" [5: 210].

T. Solodkova also points out that we resort to the notion "subjectivity" when we need to "describe subjective features of a person, specific activity character, the ability to use one's psyche to fulfill one's goals, to occupy an author's position towards one's psyche and object activity, to achieve one's goals, to alter oneself and the environment; the ability to carry responsibility" [6: 347].

The analysis carried out by L. Stakhneva enables to single out several views on the notion of subjectivity in Russian psychology.

First, "subjectivity is a special personal quality connected with actively transforming properties and abilities". Second, this is "a substantial active characteristic of a person". Third, this is "the central formation of human reality that emerges at a certain stage of development of an individual and represents its new systematic property implying the ability of independent life activity and the ability to change the world and oneself" [7: 349].

Thus, by "subject" we also mean a person at a high level of his activity who is characterized by some features that enable him to initiate and carry out various activities and realize oneself as a personality and an individual, whereas "subjectivity" implies a fundamental quality or a system of qualities that make a person a subject.

Having analyzed the works devoted to the definition of a fundamental quality that make person a subject, we can draw the following conclusions.

Characteristics of a person as a subject are connected with and manifested through the activity that he or she performs as well as through his attitude towards this activity. Besides, they are associated with different stages of the performed activity and can be described using quality indicators.

Most researches attach the primary importance to the activity of a subject. This quality enables him or her to initiate, create and control the conditions under which it takes place and to overcome emerging difficulties. Besides, significant characteristics of a subject include responsibility, creativity, goal-setting, reflection, self-regulation, self-control, self-esteem, initia-

tive, the conditioning by the inner situation, single-mindedness, autonomy, inner control locus, striving for self-development, the ability to realize oneself, productive mastering of different activities, constructive interaction with the environment, action design, i.e. all the whole range of the qualities "enabling to achieve results of an activity that correspond to the subjective criteria of successfulness" [8: 158].

In the subject-activity approach the qualities of a person as a subject are manifested in their various activities. Thus, these two notions are interconnected. It also enables us to analyze the development of subjectivity by means of observing external features of the activity and its motives, goals, conditions of organization, evaluation criteria, etc.

Moreover, I. Yurov points out that according to A. Brushlinsky's theory, a person is not born as a subject but becomes one in the course of performing actions, communication, and other activities [9: 228].

A number of researches (G. Prygin, V. Shadrikov, E. Nekrasova) also note that subjectivity is manifested through the activity caused by inner motives in the process of its purposeful organization.

Particular attention should be paid to the interconnection between the development of subjectivity and the ability to design one's own activity thus changing one's existence. Noteworthy is also the "the goal of revealing the role of the subjectivity in providing the ability of an individual to explore and productively alter the objective reality (including one's own psyche), to design one's life activity and course of life" [10: 162]. It is the ability design that determines one's life activity, for this ability (which implies consciousness, purposefulness, objectivity, practicality and similar features) differentiates a subject's activity from similar behavior types typical of animals. The principle of the unity of consciousness and activity suggested by S. Rubenstein only further proves the designing and self-developing character of activity in the course of its planning and realization" [2: 141].

The development of subjectivity occurs in the process of moving from the development of a perception subject, imitation subject and unconditioned implementation towards the development of creativity. Besides, an important part is played by the development of inner motivation and inner sources of control over the activity [11: 305].

A. Zhilinskaya sees the development of a subject in implementing the following inner transitions:

– from the perception of situation as the only possible option which is entirely pre-determined from outside and beyond personal influence towards the perception of the situation as one of the options that could be influenced by the person;

– from blurred towards clear foundations of an action (consciously accepted norms of activity or values);

– from suggesting occasional actions towards making well-grounded assumptions about an object of transformation (these assumptions are based on the knowledge about activity and situation);

– from participating in activity because of its characteristics other than its goal towards the participation based on self-determination about norms and values that are realized in it [12: 86].

In the analysis of a subject's features from psychological viewpoint one could see the prospects of the interdisciplinary interaction of such sciences as psychology and pedagogics, when "one science can explain and the other can change the reality based on the provided explanation" [13: 170].

Studies of subject position as a foundation of the professional development of a student stress that self-determination in the educational and professional environment takes place during adolescence (in the course of professional training). During this period a person not only chooses his or her profession but also develops the attitude towards the subject he or she studies, towards the professional activity and towards oneself. This context should feature the development of the subject position of a student as "his own master, the master of his actions and aspirations". This is quite a long process, and the less systematically it unfolds, the safer it is to say that the subject position of a student is undeveloped and fails to meet the up-to-date requirements for the competence of a specialist.

T. Barysheva also points out that "the development of students' subject position in the course of their professional growth is an important and relevant goal of modern higher education" [14: 234]. Among the factors affecting the possibility of subject position development particularly notable are the role of the reflective teaching methods and the creation of pedagogical conditions for nurturing students' need to reflect upon their own professional and personal experience [Ibid: 235].

However, our studies have shown that many researchers (both in Russia and abroad) point out the lack of proper development of students' subject position. Today the accepted objective of a university is to provide relevant knowledge and skills. At the same time skills connected with the development of education are not sufficiently marked. It is due to the fact that the learning process is organized as a learning activity whereas the development of a subject position implies the transition to educational activity.

The conducted analysis suggests that students are, in essence, mature people who have consciously chosen their future profession and have already mastered the techniques of self-organization, self-education, and self-control; therefore they are also responsible for the quality of their training and are not active subjects of their educational activity [15]. Empirical findings reveal the orientation of students towards reproductive ways of performing the tasks they face, a low level of motivation (mainly external motivation), insufficient readiness to organize the learning process on their own

and tailor it to their own needs. Besides, students do not participate in determining and controlling their educational activity and do not have adequate means of doing it.

Nor do students attach sufficient importance to the design of activity and its organization on their own. Thus, in order to develop a subject position it is necessary, among other things, to create the conditions that would enable a student to take their own initiative, set their goals, design and control their activity, be the creator and the subject of activity, not its object that is externally influenced by teachers, parents, administration, etc.

Many theory and practice oriented educators believe that a prerequisite for a transition to a new educational culture should not be the introduction of new academic disciplines that set the goal of developing new skills. Besides, suggestions are put forward to reduce the number of disciplines and the translated information which doesn't provide the basis for gaining new knowledge so that academic classes are not overloaded and more time is given for students' independent work.

Other authors stress that in order to solve this issue some kind of extra-subject component should be included into educational practice that would promote active and responsible mastering of educational content.

The practice of organizing educational process at university often shows that the teaching and learning process leaves little space for students' independent design of contents and forms of activities. The key components of students' actions are determined by educational standards, curricula, faculty administration, and teachers. Quite often students begin to solve actual professional tasks only when they undertake pedagogical internship or placement, and like learners, they consider themselves insufficiently prepared for it.

The notion "subjectivity" implies that a person can independently initiate, organize and control his activity, including educational activity. However, it is feasible only when the person becomes the subject of the activity, can operate the techniques and means of its organization, is familiar with the stages of its design and realization and the relevant methods, and also can control, evaluate and, if necessary, correct his or her actions in accordance with the set goal.

Thus, changes in the education system should first of all affect educational methods and technologies the objective of which is to develop practical skills of working with information, self-education, projecting one's own activity of achieving results, etc. Besides, it is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to actively influence the actual process of their education, to make choices, to be able to close their educational gaps, to structure their individual trajectory of gaining and developing relevant knowledge and skills and to be consciously responsible for the results of their actions whilst mastering their profession.

In this respect, it is particularly important to address the issue of developing and introducing pedagogical technologies that enable to effectively fill in this gap which determines the content quality and results of modern education.

Today, among other major goals of higher education, specialists stress the importance of teaching not only separate competences, but also such activities as programming, monitoring, expert examination and, last but not least, designing [16: 5].

Designing is of particular interest when we speak about working with interdisciplinary content. The project method presents itself as a potential component of didactic methodology of the future, which is "the introduction of students to the problems and their gaining experience of independently solving these problems based on free information search in global information networks and comparison of their solutions with cultural models and precedents" [Ibid: 9].

Among the advantages of the project method different researchers (E. Olkers, E. Polat, V. Lutkovsky, V. Guzeev et al.) highlight the changing of students' role towards active participation and conscious responsibility, the development of students' investigation skills, the ability to independently design their knowledge, to orient themselves in informational environment, and also the development of critical and creative thinking, independent creative work in workgroups, personal orientation, the opportunity for everyone to find their thing according to their interests and abilities, and also the development of different social skills connected with the need to learn self-education techniques, gaining communicative skills, team skills, the topicality of maintain extensive contacts, getting acquainted with different viewpoints, developing the abilities to collect information from different sources, put forwards hypotheses, search for solutions, etc.

Some of the disadvantages and limitations of using the project method are formalistic attitude towards working on a project (as a way of presenting the studied material), exhaustion effect caused by the related difficulties, the growing number of challenges and demanding requirements, the complication of evaluation procedure, the difficulty of conforming to modern educational standards and curricula.

The project method has been used in foreign language teaching for a long time. Most theory and practice oriented researchers (A. Konysheva, L. Podoprigorova, T. Dysheina, E. Polat, R. Frolova, N. Kocheturova et al.) are of the opinion that the major advantages of using this method in secondary and high school institutions are as follows:

1. It can be used in learning any lexical topic.

2. It enhances the motivation and the interest to learn a foreign language.

3. It enables to bring together students' knowledge from different areas of study in order to solve a problem as well as to apply the knowledge practically.

4. It promotes active usage of a foreign language in oral and written speech.

5. It helps develop the skills of students' independent work, including extracurricular work.

6. It fosters going beyond the classroom.

7. It bridges the gap between the language that students learn and the actual language as a means of communication and cross-cultural interaction, foreign language communication with native speakers, the use of language in situations as close to real communication situations as possible.

8. Based on linguistic, cultural and sociocultural competence, it boosts communicative skills and competence which is the main objective in learning a foreign language; it develops different speech activity skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading), enables to integrate special teaching goals and involuntary memorization of lexical and grammatical material into design activity.

9. It promotes thinking and solving problems, discussing possible solutions.

10. It shifts the focus from doing various exercises onto active participation of language learners.

11. It develops such skills as working with information, searching for relevant information in the target language, working with texts, analyzing information, making summaries, drawing conclusions etc., and working with references. It also enhances communicative skills of debating, listening to one's partners, supporting and defending one's viewpoint, presenting one's ideas laconically, arriving at a compromise and so on.

12. It fosters team spirit, leadership and a sense of responsibility.

13. It familiarizes students with the culture of project designing which includes independent planning of one's own activity, foreseeing potential outcomes of solving a problem, implementing different ways and means of working, evaluating results.

14. It enables the individualization and differentiation of learning by providing the freedom to choose a project topic, means and ways of activity, one's own role in realizing the project, pace of work, the form of presenting the results, etc.

However, nowadays we observe a lack of a holistic system of organizing design activity based on gradual development and oriented towards purposeful achievement of relevant educational results. Here the activity itself is not a subject for discussion, i.e. designing is viewed as a means of working with certain materials and creating a product. Evaluated, compared to each other and analyzed are the actual visible results of designing process, i.e. products of activity.

It is also interesting to project how design methods can be used for achieving relevant educational results, namely for developing students' sub-

ject position, which happens, as has been mentioned earlier, in the general course of activity sphere development.

The analysis of education process organization practice suggests that students commence to learn the contents of their education at the very first stage of educational activity development, i.e. the activity directed at the studied material, subject or branch of knowledge. This activity is dynamic and independent in its nature, not just formal. Back in 1982 a monograph by psychologists concerned with teaching and learning issues emphasized that learning activity should be treated as any other human activity [17: 5]. In other words, learning activity should include motives and learning objectives (motivation and orientation sphere), learning actions (operational sphere) and controlling and evaluating actions (control and evaluation sphere) [Ibid: 6].

As we see it, the major feature of learning activity (that differentiates it from educational activity, for instance) is its position towards a concrete academic subject. That is to say, this activity is about the studying of material which results in acquiring relevant skill.

The next level of a student's activity sphere development is educational activity. The object of this activity is not an academic subject but one's general activity, the conditions that it takes place in, its stages, results, etc. Educational activity is supersubject in its nature. Its goal is not to gain some branch-related knowledge, skills and specific competences (e.g., mathematical, linguistic, or any other) but to build up competences connected with the ability of an individual to carry out an activity that is relevant personally to him. In this particular example it would be the activity of designing and implementing a project of one's education in general. Such an interpretation of activity implies a fundamentally new approach to setting its goals, its organization, evaluation and analysis.

In modern educational methodology the differentiation between learning and educational activity is also a topical question. Remaining within the scope of learning situation and carrying out only learning actions students do not venture to change the situation by these actions of their own, do not take any responsibility, which automatically means that they are unable to acquire some kinds of competences (for example, a number of social competences such as making responsible decisions, choices and so on).

In case of some formalization (including from the teacher's part), a student's learning may lack crucial stages of wholesome activity, beginning with the stage of goal-setting and finishing with the process of comparing the outcome to what was initially desired and expected. That is to say, this activity will not be an activity in its general educational sense.

Nevertheless, learning activity backed up by the teacher and directed at an academic subject but specifically organized will promote the acquirement of a certain range of competences, namely those associated with the-participant-of-the-activity and the-performer-of-certain-actions sphere. Thus,

learning activity is a key component in creating and developing competences because the transition to the conscious educational activity is impossible without a well-formed students' learning activity sphere.

By educational action we mean an activity the content of which is represented by educational process organization. So, this is the joint activity of the teacher and the learner directed at achieving the common goal and carried out within the scope of the subject-object relationship. Here the learner is rather the object of the teacher's actions (at least the actions of organization, implementation, control and improvement of the learning process).

Nonetheless, a learning action must be treated as an important stage in educational process. It is a prerequisite for acquiring and developing certain skills and abilities, some procedural knowledge, which is also part of competences (in this particular case execution level competences). These basic skills enable to build up the pyramid of competences while setting increasingly more complicated goals and getting more and more involved in the activity.

Thus, designing nowadays can be viewed as a resource that enables to manage, control and organize one's own activity in any sphere of life. Designing can be taught only where it becomes a special branch of activity, which requires creating conditions for organizing educational activity and the participants' awareness of their role in this process that depends on the autonomy and complexity level of the performed activity. So, there is an awareness of the fact that the subject of the activity can affect and change his activity, be it learning, educational or professional activity.

Designing enables students to set their own goals, to implement their plans, to put their own sense into learning and educational activity, i.e. to identify the personal content of their activity as well as the joint activity of the teacher and the learner as subjects of activity. Beginning with setting the design goals, defining task and means of their fulfillment, and finishing with the evaluation and results presenting stage, all the stages of designing involve active participation of the subjects of the educational process, i.e. learners, their ultimate engagement into the activity of goal setting, choosing the best ways of task fulfillment, etc.

The result of this activity is not only a visible product but also the changes in the subjective characteristics of the participants of this process, the acquirement and development of new qualities, i.e. competences, and, as has been mentioned above, their establishment as the subjects of activity. It also indicates that the organization of the educational process with the use of design technique promotes the transition to the self-organization, self-development, self-education and self-realization of learners, which provides them with a special resource that they will be able to use during the rest of their lives.

Thus, designing can be viewed as a means of modifying the activity content in educational process, as well as a means of changing the results of

education. At the same time, gradual and purposeful transition from learning activity towards educational activity characterized by different degrees of the learner's independence, involvement in the organization of activity and determination of its content, suggests that this method can be used for the development of subject position of the education participants.

In educational practice we therefore can single out various types of design teaching that provide different levels of the teacher's and the student's involvement and the setting of goals and objectives of the education that respectively reflect different levels of their subject position development.

1. A learning project as a type of educational design can be represented by the following characteristics. The topic, the goals and the means of their achievement are given to the participants of the project. Their influence on the setting of the project goal is limited by the given project task. The organization of the joint design activity is represented by the distribution of the functions in creating a definite product; the learners are to comprehend and, if necessary, to revise these functions. The educational position of the learner is defined as "The performer of project tasks". The educational results are represented by academic achievements.

2. An educational project as a type of educational design is characterized by the involvement of the learners in the setting of project goals, objectives and tasks, in the mastering of technologies and the reflection of design means for creating joint design activity. Necessary are the competences of organizing joint activity of developing and implementing a project. Much attention is paid not to the product of designing, but to the analysis of designing as an effective means of developing and implementing a project. Designing here is viewed as a means of establishing the subject of the project development and implementation, while the means of organizing joint activity are incorporated into the contents of education.

Designing itself becomes the subject of education and a discussion topic. In teaching project development techniques the organization of joint activity and design is elevated up to the level of reflective comprehension of the contents of the project techniques as a special type of activity. The educational position of project participants is defined as "The developer of project activity".

An educational project reflects the contents of designing in the concept of competency-based teaching in which designing is used both as a means of developing various competences and as a special unit of the contents of education. Competency-based teaching which is grounded on the reflective reconstruction of educational results implies that the content of the project activity is created in this or that way by the participants of education; it is not defined from outside prior to action. In competency-based teaching the organization designing includes the inspection and reflection of design activity. The degree of mastering of design competency becomes one of the

educational results in case the teacher organizes the reflective comprehension of the contents and methodology of this type of work.

3. Besides, we single out pedagogic internship designing as a separate type of profession-oriented design. This kind of work promotes the realization of a student's subject position in a real situation, with the student being "The organizer of educational activity", which, in its turn, should confirm a definite level of competency development necessary for effective professional activity and successful functioning in different areas of life.

Designing an individual program of pedagogic internship enables students to set educational goals, to implement their educational plans, to structure the contents of educational activity, which is the joint activity of the teacher and the learner as the subjects of education. It also enables to independently organize educational interaction with the use design technologies.

In the process of comprehending and mastering educational modules design competences are gradually developed and students' subject is established.

This happens due to the following:

– the influence of the participants of designing on the content of activity (the creation of a plan, the definition of problems, the setting of project goals);

– consecutive enlargement of design objective and functions in the process of the establishment of their action sphere.

The ultimate goal is reached due to the realization of the following contents of designing:

– the inclusion of the experimental program participants into the design practice;

– the mastering of the activity contents in learning design;

– the comprehension of one's own educational activity as an object for designing desired changes in one's educational environment, the experience of designing one's own educational trajectory;

– the enlargement of the view of the situation in which this method can be used and the further use of this resource for designing the activity of achieving one's goals in general and implementing the first project of one's professional activity in particular.

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