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## Pedagogical Action in Educational Space of the Younger Pupils Schooling Activities

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*In this paper we characterise the individual learning action of primary school children as proactive, independent and responsible. A necessary condition to form academic self-sufficiency is a special pedagogical action, when retention of the functional difference between the two parts of learning action that is between orientation and performance becomes the subject of teacher's work. A teacher develops a polarised education space in such a way as to watch how children organise preparatory part of their action, whether the children are active in using notational systems and address the teacher or peers facing difficulties, how they make decisions switching from preparation to implementation. The paper details the essential characteristics of the teaching action which are the openness and targeting. Targeting of the pedagogical action is understood in different aspects of individual learning activities presented as a difference between orientation and implementation. The example of the open teaching action in organising academic work of the children on designing notation (helpers) is considered in detail.*

*Keywords: developmental education, pedagogical action, individual learning action, academic self-sufficiency, responsibility, initiative, educational space of learning activities, notation.*

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*This work represents an attempt to answer the question "What is pedagogical action in developmental education?" The experimental developments on the project "Educational space of primary school children" became the material on the basis of which we considered the idea of pedagogic action being the subject of teacher's work*

The project aims at developing the individual learning action of primary school children into independent and responsible one. **Educational action is an action that is not associated with improvement of the individual and their abilities, but with improvement of the ways used**

**to do some work.** Proactive and self-responsible action of the child takes place when he or she takes the problem of an adult as their own task. Proactive action is connected with the response and in this sense is associated with certain risks. Response of an adult (e.g. the teacher is giving the mark) addresses the child who performs the action. And that is why every responsible action is related to the decision making. In this sense, the choice is always the choice whether to "act in public way" or "not". In our opinion, when forming academic self-sufficiency the teacher has to deal with creating a choice situation for the child to consciously make decisions realising

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when they are ready to do something and when not to.

At present the theory and practice of developmental education doesn't confirm that the issue of individual ability to learn has been settled and learning action became personal, independent and responsible. As V.V. Davydov and D.B. Elkonin said, the subject of learning activity is not only the person who performs well writing, reading, solves the problems, but the one who can prepare implementation of any action of the class who can find themselves a way to solve a class of concrete- practical problems. To line up the way, in contrast to achieve the result means to solve educational problem. Individual understanding by children of the orienting basis of the forthcoming action, i.e. the way to do it – wrote D.B. Elkonin – is the main idea of a learning task “(Эльконин, 1989, 216).

We believe that the initiative in decision making being the most important feature of individual action can and should manifest itself very early. However, in order to make it manifest, it is necessary to create a special space of children action. Adults can participate in joint action with the child so that the child could have possibility and necessity to make choices within the limits corresponding to every age.

In our project, the main method to build individual learning action responsible and associated with decision-making was dividing of children's actions into two parts which are preparatory and executive. The action of the child from the outset was understood as distinction and switching from preparing (training) to implementing.

We considered our project as orientation (“draft”) of children action and talked about orientation and implementation of children's actions. Now we reconsider the project from the point of view of teacher's actions.

Why should the teacher have distinction between training and implementation ? In previous studies we showed that this distinction is essential for creation of the child action and all our polarisations are means for developing individual learning actions (Островерх, 1997; 2003; 1994). Can means of polarisation of the educational space be understood as means of teachers', rather than children's work? If yes, then what is the object of teacher's work?

We claim that the **object of teacher's action is the very structure of child's action but not I of child's action in general, but its structure in the aspect of two functions existing in one action, and often fused..** As a rule, traditional school in the person of the teacher directs it to the value and importance of implementation. In developmental education teachers value different things: they value more preparation than results of implementation for the teacher teaches how to draw up a draft. The teacher should organize the space of learning work in such a way that the child could prepare implementation of any action of this class, ie to devise a way of solving a class of problems (Давыдов, 1996). This space is a learning task from the start should come as a training space where the child is building his experience with the tool.

In the developmental education the teacher's action should be linked to the initiation of the orienting-exploratory and wider – all preparatory actions.

Let us consider what this initiation, leading to the independent action of the child means.

Following L.S. Vygotsky, D.B. Elkonin we believe that the essential point is the work of the adult on giving children's action some sense, sometimes even when the action was a failure. It is essential that children act should be **reinterpreted by adults as a tentative, exploratory action.** The very meaning of the action is exploratory in nature and this should be stressed.

Here is a famous example by L.S. Vygotsky about the origin of the pointing gesture.”Consider, for example – Vygotsky wrote, – the history of the pointing gesture, which, as we shall see plays a crucial role in the development of a child’s speech and is generally to a considerable extent the ancient basis of all higher forms of behaviour. Initially, the pointing gesture is simply unsuccessful grasping movement. A child tries to grasp an object which is too far removed, his hands outstretched to the subject, remain in the air, his fingers are doing pointing movements. This situation is the source for further development. For the first time there is a pointing movement, which we are entitled to call a pointing gesture in itself. There is a movement of the child, objectively indicating the object and nothing more.

When the mother comes to help the child and **interprets** it as a pointing movement, the situation changes significantly. In response to the unsuccessful grasping movement of the child there is no reaction on the part of the subject, but from another person. The original meaning of unsuccessful grasping movement is understood, thus, by others. And only afterwards, based on the fact that unsuccessful grasping movement is associated by the child throughout the objective situation, he begins to take this movement as pointing...

The child comes, therefore, to realize his gesture last. Its value and function first are determined by the initial objective situation, and then by the people around the child. Pointing gesture shows by the movement what is understood by others and only later is understood by the child “(Выготский, 1984, 144).

Usually, this example is considered as a model when it comes to interpsychic form of existence of mental functions. This example reveals two aspects of transition from the interpsychic to the intrapsychic. One aspect lies in the fact that essence of outside collective

behaviour form is transmission of some support from one person (adult) to another (child), with the help of which he organises his conduct and in the future, this support becomes internal. We are interested in the second aspect related to the fact that the support (stimulus) is developed in case it is used as a means of addressing another person.

Unsuccessful grasping movement is reinterpreted by mother as a pointing movement. Being reconsidered it is returned to the child.

For us, such reconsideration is the centre of communication between children and adults. What does reconsideration mean in our case?

Here is an example of our project work.

At the beginning of schooling when the child brings the completed assignment to the teacher, the teacher asks, “What should be evaluated in your work?” In other words, the child simply shows the teacher the work performed, and the teacher reconsiders it as something where is a preparatory part, which is not assessed, and this distinguishes it from the part of implementation.

The teacher begins to treat the action as the action of search. And this attitude is expressed in a functional interpretation (reconsideration) directed at the child and accepted by him or her.

Teacher reconsiders (reinterprets) the child’s work subdividing it into two parts which are training and preparation. The question arises: What is a schooling initiative?

First, the teacher begins to see in the child’s work a “draft” and then the child reconsiders their work the same way.

Here is an example of the primary school pupil during the time of dictation on the Russian language at the end of the academic year.

The pupil wrote the entire dictation. After that, she checks all the work, finds a misspelled word, and highlighted it.

Experimenter: Why have you highlighted the word?

Pupil: Now it's time of dictation. I'll revise misspelled words at home.

In this example we see that the girl is planning her future work. Checking and highlighting misspelled words is preparation of the future action. Her own work is regarded as both implementation (she wrote a dictation) and as preparation of the future action.

In our opinion, such work which from the point of view of the child can be continued can be considered individual learning action.

So, in order to cause an individual educational action it is necessary to allocate a special subject of the teacher's work and it is far from being trivial. It is associated with retention of functional differences, the relationship between the preparation and implementation. The subject of the teacher's observation and work is distinctions and transitions between the two functional parts of the action – between the orientation and training in a broad sense, and implementation. The teacher begins to study not only how the child mastered the lesson, but the way he or she organises preparation, whether they are active in using notational systems (models, diagrams) as a means of analysing the problem, words, sentences, whether they address the teacher or peers when face difficulties, etc.

The main idea of the pupil-teacher communication lies in rethinking, reinterpretation of the child's work by the adult person. The teacher interprets something as opposed to implementation and conveys it to the child. The teacher is engaged in rethinking all the time, as well as in understanding and designing.

Turning to the main objectives of the project, we emphasise that our experiment was intended to design such teachers' actions, which would show the child the subject of his or her action and understanding, how they can convert their own ways of doing academic work. This transformation has a proactive and responsible

form of behaviour. Initiative, responsibility and learning occur as a result or educational effect, and can not be formed directly and immediately.

**What does the introduction of these distinctions bring about? What is the growth in teachers' work?**

A striking growth occurs when teachers have great opportunities to observe the children. The teacher in addition to pedagogical tasks consisting in delivering the contents is watching the child preparing his or her action, whether it is adequately developed, what means they use for it.

Here, we stress an important characteristic of the teaching action which is its openness. According to B.D. Elkonin: "The action which was designed using initiation, manifestation and retention of a particular action (behaviour) can be called an open action. In successful cases, an adult develops an open action, and that it is the way to enable the child to participate in the action of an adult, that is, using the way of developing by cumulative effects" (Эльконин, 1989, 62). Teachers' action becomes *productive* when the *child* turns into *action*, an independent, rather than emulating the model of an *adult*.

And the first form of such self-sufficiency, we could see when the child was designing a draft. By the middle of the first year we got **individual features in training**.

So, at the lesson in writing in the first year (December), children were given the task: to write the word *melon*. On a separate table there are cards that can be used as an aid. On some cards the word is written entirely, on others only syllables and on the rest only some letters. Cards are made so that you can trace the pattern and write a line of elements.

One of the pupils took the card with a word. He began to write and failed. After this, he went to the table, took a card with the first syllable, practised a bit, and then took the card with the second syllable, wrote a line and then again

practised in writing of the whole word. Then drew the line, separating his practice, and wrote the whole word to be evaluated by the teacher.

In this case, availability of different cards, “helpers” creates the possibility of choice and allows you to vary the content of practice with respect to the difficulties with which the child experienced during the work. *A variety of forms of exercise is one of our criteria of occurrence of individual learning action.*

One of the primary symptoms that distinguish the preparation and implementation does take place, is the *emergence of children’s words* reflecting the meaning of the action. In our case, the children began to call the table with the cards – a table with “helpers”. When a child singles out with the help of a word of special reality something which can actually help means another indicator that the child distinguishes and connects two parts of the work.

The task of the teacher was to provide the child with the widest possible range of tools. At the initial stage of schooling they were used for to “correct” writing, and the children used them in case of difficulty (the elements of letters, numbers, etc.).

We distinguish two types of child behaviour. One implies formation of the actual “draft”, when the child’s action develops within the tools proposed by the teacher. And the second, type is actually the work of the Child on producing, designing tools.

Psychological meaning of this work is that the child is trying to determine the functional significance of things, makes attempts to study them in relation to each other, with regard to the tool helping to solve the problem. What does it mean to make the tool? It means to keep both the tool and the future task.

Of course, this distinction between a tool and a task isn’t realised by a child. Contrasting the tools and tasks in the objective terms (table

with “helpers” and “table for evaluation”), we observed that for the child, and this is an interesting psychological fact it is not trivial. During the first year, the child is confused, and when he takes his “helper”, he in reality takes the task. At the end of the first year, and to a greater extent in the second, when there are special classes for the production of “helpers”, the child begins to confuse them on another level, saying that makes for someone a helper, he writes a task for him. By the mid-end of the second year the child begins to distinguish tasks and tools, i.e. it means that he differs tools from the problem, and the desired result.

This work of children on producing “helpers” is of great interest and can be used as a means of pedagogical diagnostics. Namely, looking at the “helper” created by the child, we can conclude how he or she can generalise academic material, whether they can identify the mode of action and its essential characteristics and to illustrate them by example of their own.

The fact that the “helpers”, created by pupils differed both according to the level of generalisation, and to design, is an indicator of the effectiveness of teachers’ actions. In this case, teachers’ work enables the child to work not according to the pattern but independently realising what is effective means of solving the problem. This peculiarity, which we have when producing helpers should be working, but not demonstrative.

In our case, if the teacher gives the task to make a “helper”, and the work of is completed with a result it is a manifestation of the closed pedagogic action (when an adult provides the conditions under which you can only do so and not otherwise). In contrast to the closed pedagogic actions “The action which was designed using initiation, manifestation and retention of a particular action (behaviour) can be called an open action (Эльконин и др. 1996, 63).

Actually open action involves creation of conditions under which the child himself will try to do something. In our case, the child is trying to do a “helper” and looking for a way how to present it to others, the rule or a scheme with examples.

Open pedagogic action means also that a teacher is supposed to cooperate with children. For example, to check whether the created “helper” helps solve the problem or not. In our work, such checking looked like a distributed collective action when the created “helper” was handed by the child to another pupil who tested the “helper” in the situation of solving the problem or doing an exercises. It is essential to note that the work of one child with the “helper” of another led to the alteration, remaking of the “helper”.

Here, we observed children’s initiatives to continue their action. Thus, in the first form, Julia H. on her own initiative created a “helper” and said to the teacher, “I figured out and made a” helper”, let’s hang it on the blackboard, it may be able to help kids.” In the third form a week after they worked to create “helpers” the children turned to the teacher asking about their use. Thus, one of the pupils asked the teacher: “And let me give Kate my “ helper” and I’ll see if it can help her or not,” then during the classes she sat next to Kate and watched as the girl used her “helper.” when Kate made a mistake solving the problem Julia drew her attention to the card, where the way of action was recorded. The emergence of such initiatives, we consider as the main criterion confirming that adult action developed as an open one.

Along with such essential characteristic of the teacher as openness we identify another characteristic of the teaching action which is targeting. We hypothesised that the positive dynamics in the formation of individual learning actions, a shift in the development of children’s actions can be observed in case when pedagogical

action is directed to the children with different levels of formation of learning action.

We emphasise that non-triviality of this approach consists in the fact that the goal of the teacher is not so much children’s personal characteristics and styles of their work, not so much a measure of the mastering of the subject content by children, but the development of children’s actions as independent learning actions.

To date, we know that for the formation of academic self-efficiency educator should develop their pedagogical actions, using different institutional forms (lesson, polarised- lesson) and elements of the educational space:

- Tables with cards for practice, tables with cards “helpers”, tables with cards” for evaluation”.
- Individual boards for practice, children’s notebooks divided into a draft and fair copy.
- Dividing of the blackboard into tow parts: for practice and evaluation etc.

Objectives of the study, conducted in 2004 – 05 academic year, were in fact to determine the main difficulties the children on first and second level of formation of individual learning action face:

- To conduct a diagnostic procedure and divide children into three groups with high, medium and low levels of formation of individual learning actions.
- To find the means and methods of pedagogic actions that will be effective for work with children in each of the three groups.

Pedagogic action turns out targeting when the shift happens in development of an independent learning action for children of the first and second groups, and the zone of proximal development of their academic self-efficiency will be found with the children of the third level of learning action.

We started with identifying deficiencies in learning action of the pupils. It should be noted that if the two groups of pupils with low and middle levels of learning action develop the work consisted in the selection and description of the deficiencies of their educational activities, then the pupils with the third level of development of individual learning actions had to determine what could become a zone of proximal development of their action, what could be the task, when children feel deficiency in their learning actions.

The third “m” form of gymnasium № 1 “Universe” was chosen as experimental. In this group of pupils for the first two years of study the work had been carried out in accordance with technology of the polarisations of educational space in two subjects (in Russian and mathematics). In early October 2004 a diagnostic procedure number 1, “Preparing for the tests” was held and the children were divided into three groups. Along with the lessons the teacher conducted special classes and polarised lessons

Let us describe three key, in our opinion, types of work with pupils from different groups.

### **1 type of work “Finding difficulties”**

The children of the first group (low-level of formation of individual learning actions) are characterised by the following deficiencies: inability to define their own difficulties, lack of initiative in using tools and addressing the teacher, the inadequacy of the action when the pupil chooses work for assessment, but fails to do it, small amount of completed work (for example, such children, as a rule, do not have time to do the whole work when writing a test) and, consequently, have low results for test papers.

The purpose of work with such children was to teach them to see their own difficulties. Within two months at each math lesson, the children performed the same type of work (table of multiplication and division). At the beginning of the lesson, the pupils determined in which

cases of multiplication and division they make mistakes, and then bearing them in mind chose an assignment, (a card with examples) and did for ten minutes. Thus, pupils could track their achievements in the course of time, the amount of work yesterday (a week, a month ago), and how it has changed today.

At the classes of practice, pupils worked with an hourglass to how much time they spend doing this or that type of work. Doing homework (the same kind of work – table of multiplication and division), these children also used the hourglass and learnt to control the amount of work.

What was the result of such work? The students raised the tempo and increased the amount of work which improved performance of the tests. As teachers noted, children became more confident and began to check their works differently.

### **2 type of work “Working with “helpers””**

The children of the second group are characterized by deficiency in understanding notation. We believe that if in children’s action there is a gap in the correlation of tool and task, pedagogical action should be directed to the removal of this deficiency.

As a rule, the traditional pedagogy, if a child has a deficiency with using a drawing or a scheme) teaches to use this tool, offering a lot of training cards, and by repeated training the child learns to deal with the rule or pattern. Novelty of our approach lies in the fact that when a child fails to solve the problem and has problems with using tools, he or she should be returned to the production of tools. There are two types of work: work on the production of a tool and work on its application.

In the second group of children there was held special training “Making helpers” where children created “helpers” to each other, and then they tested them, that is, a tool made by one child was tested by another, the one who made

the tool analysed it. At such sessions the focus shifted from solving problems by using notation to creation (as if to re-recreate) of notation and to analysis of them in terms of why they could be called “helpers.”

It is interesting to note that when a pupil or a group of kids tested the “helper” made by another pupil it was, returned to the author afterwards. So, boys, after having tested the “helper for the distributive law of multiplication,” created by girls, advised them to generalise it: “And the best is to put the letters instead of numbers”, ie in the analysis of others’ ‘helper’ children go to a higher level of generalising. Working with the deficiency of children’s action we observed, what are the results of a particular type of work, whether changes occur in the motivation of children, whether they get new interests.

The third type of work “Self-study of the topic” was offered to children with high level of individual learning action. Children at this level are characterised by ability to hold the ratio of preparation and implementation, namely, develop their preparation adequately, both with respect to their own difficulties, and the objective of their future work, ie hold the goal of the action, are initiative in choosing tools and know how to apply them in solving problems. These children on their own initiative, without waiting for the end of the lesson can finish their training and move to test, ie these pupils define limits of their work themselves.

Speaking about the fact that the child holds the ratio of preparation and implementation it should be said, within what range it happens?

We characterise the effect of individual learning within the boundaries where the work is given by the teacher when the cards to practise are offered by the teacher, when the “helpers” are created by children, are discussed together with the teacher and then are laid out in the space of a classroom on a separate table.

When organising work, “Self-study of the topic,” we removed these restrictions. It was suggested to a group of seven pupils to work independently in another room, while the remaining pupils were working with a teacher in the classroom. There was given only one theme “Writing equations”, and tasks on the study of this subject the pupils chose from the textbook themselves. As a result of independent work the pupils produced a test on the subject for pupils in their class.

The criteria for monitoring observations were selected as follows: whether the objective of the work is held (whether selected by the pupils for independent work assignments correspond to the subject or not), how much work each child does, what difficulties faces, whether they address other pupils or the teacher, what are the results of the test on the theme, what tasks are included in the test work for the class (whether they correspond to the theme, complexity of tasks).

As a result of this work it was found that all seven students were able to study the new theme, opened a new way and then did the test paper given by the teacher with “excellent” mark, and made up a test for their comrades properly.

It should be noted that making up the test paper for the whole class aroused the greatest interest, after doing it the pupils asked the teacher to check up the work. Moreover, when checking the test papers, a special attitude of these children towards the works of their classmates occurred, they tried to notice every achievement: “Vika, well done, she did everything right, did not make any mistakes.

If you look at the test paper made up by the children, we can see that they included both; skill-building tasks (to solve the equation), and tasks to make up schemes, tasks setting traps. What was the subject of testing for these children? The tasks where the children had to correlate the various symbolic means as well as the subject of search of



pupils are border of actions which were presented in the form of a task setting a trap. Changing conditions (when you suggest the child making up a test paper or solving the problem) allows you to see at what level of mastery of the tool and as a consequence, the level of development of schooling action the child is.

The fact that pupils were able to organise their own work on the subject and did it with excellent results opens new possibilities in the development of individual learning actions. Younger pupils (in the second half of primary school age) can hold the purpose of the action in a new subject content (new topic), can self-organise a new subject material and master the method of action and can also evaluate the method of action (making up tasks on simulation and the boundaries of the method of action).

The results of this type of work can be described as follows:

- All children had desire to work independently, even though the work was addressed only to one group of children.
- Emotions of some children (a pupil asks her mother questions: “Will I be accepted to the group?”) works on the test herself:
- Responsible attitude towards the work (a group of girls working on their own, often had meaningful questions, they distributed the “who makes test work for whom?”, collectively discussed, whose task should be included in the test paper work, and whose should not),
- Interest and desire to work independently increased in children. They asked the teacher questions: “When will we work that way?” The teacher replied, “If you get excellent marks for your test papers you will work that way.” As a result, three quarters of pupils in the class got excellent marks for their tests.

A comparative study of the diagnostic procedure of “free training” was held in December 2004 and May 2005. The study involved 43 pupils of two groups of the third year of schooling. The results of the study showed that in the experimental class where targeting action was developed by the teacher by the end of the year, all children with the first (lowest) level of the action moved to the second (middle), and the number of children with a third, high level of action substantially increased by the end of the academic year. In contrast to the experimental class in the control class where the teacher also used the technique of polarisation of educational space, but didn’t develop targeting work with groups of children there was a positive trend, but changes in the development of action were not significant, and the number of children with the first level of action was the same (Table. A).

***This confirms our hypothesis that in the second half of the primary school age it is necessary to develop a special work with groups of children who have different problems with formation of individual learning actions. If you do not develop targeting pedagogic action, then there won’t occur a significant shift in the development of learning self-efficiency of pupils.***

***If you hold individual learning action of a child as a goal of the pedagogic action then the content of all forms of organisation (types of work, polarisation) become tools in the educational space as space of the teacher’s activities.*** Targeting pedagogic action is called so, because the different sides of the individual schooling action, presented as a distinction between orientation and implementation, turned out to be at the center of the pedagogic search.

One should emphasise arising of children’s learning interest, *the interest coming from the content of the subject*. It is also an indicator that pedagogical action was developed as an

Table 1. Features of DT difference in the elderly according to gender and place of residence, years. Comparative analysis of the dynamics of the formation at the beginning and end of the third class (the number of students in%)

|                     | The third level of the action |         | The second level of the action |       | The first level of the action |       |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
|                     | before                        | after   | before                         | after | before                        | after |
| 3, "m" 23<br>(100%) | 4%                            | [22].   | 70%                            | 78.   | 26%                           | 0%    |
| 3 "d" 20<br>(100%)  | 5%                            | #, (10) | 60%                            | 70%   | -35                           | 20%   |

\* Differences between the data in italics in the columns are statistically significant by  $\chi^2$  ( $p > 95\%$ ).

intermediary, open action, in contrast to direct actions of the teacher.

Developing individual schooling action, without formation of motives for learning

directly, we develop also children's interests, we get the interest of the child to his own learning.

The main motive of the teacher is developing children's educational interest.

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## **Педагогическое действие в образовательном пространстве учебной деятельности младших школьников**

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*В данной статье определяется индивидуальное учебное действие младшего школьника как действие инициативное, самостоятельное и ответственное. Необходимым условием формирования учебной самостоятельности является особое педагогическое действие, когда предметом работы учителя становится удержание функционального различия между двумя частями учебного действия – ориентировкой и исполнением. Учитель особым образом строит поляризованное образовательное пространство и наблюдает за тем, как ребенок организует подготовительную часть своего действия, инициативен ли он в обращении к знаковым средствам, обращается ли в ситуации затруднения к учителю, сверстникам, как принимает решение при переходе от подготовки к реализации. В статье подробно описаны существенные характеристики педагогического действия – открытость и адресность. Адресность педагогического действия понимается в аспекте разных сторон индивидуального учебного действия, представленного как различие ориентировки и реализации. Подробно рассматривается пример открытого педагогического действия при организации учебной работы детей по конструированию знаковых средств («помощников»).*

*Ключевые слова: развивающее обучение, педагогическое действие, индивидуальное учебное действие, учебная самостоятельность, ответственность, инициатива, образовательное пространство учебной деятельности, знаковое средство.*

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