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Psychological Problems of Learning Resistance

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Abstract

The article refers to the phenomenon of learning resistance and assumes that individual defense mechanisms have much influence upon its development. Defense mechanisms are considered as a set of actions aimed to the reduction or elimination of any change that threatens the integrity and stability of biopsychic individual. The author's method of defense mechanisms diagnostics is described, along with the field of this method application: defense mechanisms diagnostics, individual profiles for making hypotheses, hypotheses verification in a clinical interview and the following work with identified defenses involved in the learning resistance development.

Keywords: learning resistance, psychological defense, defense mechanisms, education.

1. Introduction

Among the problems of educational psychology we can definitely highlight the issues of purposeful cognitive activity development and the conditions for optimal developmental learning effect. These problems inevitably raise the question of learning resistance. Learning resistance prevents students themselves from correctly organizing their learning activity, and thus affects its success.

However, the problem of learning resistance remains mostly unexplored. There is no consensus among researchers about what it is and whether there is any given phenomenon. The problem of learning can be

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considered, on the one hand, as the part of the mechanisms of new data assimilation, and, on the other, from the point of the optimal learning organization in accordance with the learning goals and objectives, interim relationship issues between trainees and trainers are also being solved.

That’s why, the relevance of solving this problem is determined, first of all, by the practical needs of educational system further development, and, secondly, the urgent need to understand and substantiate the essence of the students’ personality characteristics, leading to the learning resistance.

1.1. Learning resistance

Using a combination of the concepts like «learning resistance» raises a number of difficulties in understanding this phenomenon in psychology. In Russian psychology most authors consider the learning resistance as a consequence of the lack of educational motivation. Another point of view: learning resistance is an explanation mechanism of failure or unwillingness to learn. For example, in psychoanalysis resistance is a defense mechanism. And the third opinion: learning resistance is considered as a separate phenomenon, which should be explained separately [1], [2], [3].

Another point of view is Alexander Poddyakov’s: he considers resistance as deliberately created by other people opposition (counterstand), made to achieve certain hidden objectives. Learning resistance here has purely external causes in relation to the student [4].

In this study, learning resistance is considered as the student's reaction to the learning activities related to psychological factors and disrupting the learning process at some stage. It can also be seen as a human response to external impact (learning), and can be considered as feedback.

Basic research in this area can now be directed to the understanding of what, how and why the student resists. Therefore, this phenomenon can be seen as a multi-layered. There is also the problem of finding what causes the resistance: is it constant or is it related to each particular learning stage and its organization?

1.2. Individual defense mechanisms as the factors of the psychological learning resistance

The goal of psychological research, opening the way to the prophylaxis and psychological correction for the students that resist learning, is to identify the reasons and conditions of learning resistance. The main reasons are such personality characteristics as defense mechanisms (DM). Defense mechanisms are defined as a set of individual actions aimed at the reduction or elimination of any change that threatens biopsychic individual’s integrity and stability [5]. They may both contribute to the development and stability of the individual and cause the disorganization and exclusion, based on their internal structure and dynamics, the level of cultural, symbolic and social mediation and their maturity [6]. They affect all aspects of mind, trying to preserve a comfortable way of being and its permanence. Learning is a process that leads to a lot of changes in the student’s psyche. Therefore, we can assume that in some cases defense mechanisms cause the disorders in learning activity. Their functioning certainly has an impact on learning, and their dynamics and variability can overcome the learning resistance.

In modern school the important part of teacher’s work with students is to take into consideration the individual characteristics of each student. These characteristics, of course, include the individual defense mechanisms. They could facilitate successful learning or interfere with it - depending on the nature of their manifestation.

2. Method

The subject of psychological defense was many times raised by different psychologists, especially in the doctrine of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. This issue has been well studied in the domestic and foreign psychology, but there is still a problem of methods used to research the defense mechanisms. Traditionally, the
DM diagnostics was performed using projective methods created within psychoanalysis. But many authors report about the lack of objectivity in these projective techniques [7]. In recent decades, the DM diagnostics in Russia are more often conducted using standardized questionnaires created by foreign authors. But modern psychometric testing and content validity show the lack of maturity and adaptation of the Russian translations of these questionnaires [7]. Therefore, we still need to develop the qualified diagnostic tool for individual defense mechanisms researching.

2.1. Tool development (IDMQ – Individual defense mechanisms questionnaire)

Theoretical and methodological framework for "IDMQ" method developed by V. A. Negrii and D. A. Titkov [8] was a combination of modern psychoanalytic approaches to the individual defense mechanisms researching [9], [6], [10], [11], [12], [13]. The procedure values are presented in linear steps, calculated using the theoretical values of mean and standard deviation, to keep the positive responses index for each scale.

This survey consists of 25 main scales (the psychological defense mechanisms: Withdrawal, Denial, Omnipotent control, Idealization, Devaluation, Projection, Introjection, Splitting, Dissociation, Repression, Regression, Isolation, Intellectualization, Rationalization, Moralization, Compartmentalization, Undoing, Turning against the Self, displacement, Reaction Formation, Reversal, Identification, Acting out, Sexualization, Sublimation) and 2 service - scale lies and scale of uncertainty (answers “not sure”). Each scale includes 5-6 statements per IDM, 120 statements in total. The Likert scale with five gradations was used for answers. The estimated time for completing the questionnaire is 18-25 minutes. To conduct the study we used a service module to create multidimensional questionnaire - system HT-line [ht-line.ru], provided by Professor A. Shmelev, scientific director of the psychometrics and testers laboratory «Human Technologies». After finishing the questionnaire the subject is provided with a brief feedback on revealed IDM profile.

The received data was analyzed with IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

The advantages of this method: reliable results, short surveys, automated handling, on-line testing and visual feedback.

Since the launch of the project about 900 people have filled the questionnaire, so we’ve received a lot of feedbacks and extensive statistics, which allow to analyze the issues and the scales, and to make some improvements.

Despite the fact that the questionnaire is appropriate for large-scale statistical researches, it focuses primarily on work with individual cases.

In this way, it creates a matrix, a working paradigm to identify and resolve the respondents’ problems. Each defense mechanism is linked to the certain patterns of behavior that manifests itself in different areas of life (including the learning activity) the stronger, the more this defense mechanism is expressed. Having a factor profile obtained using IDMQ we could build a number of hypotheses regarding the individual learning activity highlights and lowlights. Thus, you would get easy and usable working paradigm for the identification, specification and resolution of problems related to the respondents’ learning. This paradigm is also a good one because it is not only heuristic, but correctional; i. e. not only focuses on search, but shows the way to resolve the problems.

2.2. Measures and procedure

Now, let us explain specifically how it can be the part of the diagnostics.

This research was conducted with psychology department students of the Moscow State University in 2012. General scheme:

a) IDMQ profile review;

b) Hypotheses setting;
c) Hypotheses verification and refinement through the clinical interviews;
d) Work with identified defense mechanisms.

Let’s refer to the random profile (Fig.1):
This respondent has high values such factors as "Withdrawal", "Introjection", "Reverse", "Undoing", "Sublimation". Accordingly, the hypotheses would be the following (let’s take the first two DM as an example):

a) Probably, he is inclined to avoid problems by the complete leaving the situation, one way or another (Withdrawal), for example, he may be distracted by dreams, or sleep, or have a tendency to use drugs, distorting his mind, instead of solving the actual problem. This can be described as ‘taking counsel of one’s pillow’;

b) Perhaps, he uncritically accepts the information if it comes from a meaningful / respected person (Introjection). What consequences this may have for the study? He may not accept and reject any proposed data, because he already has received some information earlier, he may absorb controversial or hypothetical situation as if they were the ultimate truth, he may deeply depend on the emotional background of the environment, teachers, parents, etc.

It’s enough to use positive hypotheses, although we used all hypotheses at the beginning of research – including the ones caused by the unexpressed defense mechanisms (“the student will have no problem with…”). In most cases, our hypotheses were correct: no more than one mistake for one case (about one problem -DM).

We verified and refined our hypotheses during the clinical interviews. After that we could start the correctional work we are currently developing the method for.

3. Summary

The data obtained through the questionnaire can be used to further correctional work depending on the way of the particular school. These could be both individual consultations with the school psychologist, and group training sessions aimed to understanding the unconscious mechanisms. The developed special program could help to achieve the psychological well-being - become effective, study not only good, but with pleasure, be successful in the activities and objective perception of reality.

This is a complex process that requires a lot of time, because we are dealing with personal characteristics, that are, furthermore, so deep. However, it is clear that the educational work can not completely ignore the personal unconscious mechanisms, as they affect all aspects of life, including learning.

Keeping in mind the personal unconscious characteristics and their role in the educational work opens the way to:

- optimization and greater individualization of learning process;
- better understanding of the students’ psychological characteristics by teachers;
- development of self-awareness and reflection in the students themselves, improve their psychological well-being.

References


