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FORMING SELF-CONTROL MENTAL CONDITIONS OF SECONDARY PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTION STUDENTS TO ENSURE NON-VIOLENT

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Abstract

The paper presents experimental data which demonstrates the need for forming the capacity of students of secondary professional institutions to self-regulate their mental states as a condition to ensure their non-violent attitude to the world and to themselves. The aim of this research was to study (1) the ability of students of secondary professional institutions to self-regulate their mental states and (2) the organization of learner-centered classes aimed at developing the ability of students to self-regulate their emotional, volitional, cognitive mental states and mental states experienced during communication processes. The contents of learner-centered activities are designed in accordance with the typology of mental states (emotional, cognitive, volitional, social) and with the structure of the mental self-regulation process (reflecting on one's actual state and visualizing the desired state, keeping in check motivation levels, using psycho-regulative techniques and reflecting on any changes in one's state). The results were collected before and after the organized student-centered educational process. Assessment was carried out with the use of appropriate and interrelated methods. Over the course of our experimental work we were able to improve the ability of students for mental self-regulation. The materials of the article are of practical value to educational psychologists, teachers working in secondary professional institutions.

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1. Introduction

The effective performance of any professional activity in the modern world is impossible without getting involved in situations that require one to compete, rival and self-control which might lead people to experience disturbed mental states, often manifested through violent behavior towards oneself and others. The developed ability for mental self-regulation is an important component of a successful, professionally competent, continually developing and psychologically mature personality.

The development of a person who is able to without any difficulty perceive and understand the emotions of other people and control his/her own mental states is seen as a necessary condition for successful socialization in today's socio-cultural environment.

It is necessary to develop this ability in students of secondary professional institutions due to the fact that they are in the age group (15-18 years) which is prone to and particularly sensitive to changes in their emotions: the nature of emotions and the ways they are expressed change determining the direction of a teenager's personal development.

2. Problem Statement

Developing the ability of students of secondary professional institutions to effectively self-regulate their mental states is important in view of the fact that all people inherently desire to express themselves, their inner state in forms acceptable in their community, characterized by non-violent attitudes towards themselves and other people.

Educational activities often put students in stressful situations that require an adequate response which is possible to produce if one is able to manage one's own mental and intellectual states. However, simply creating the conditions for the formation of this ability in the process of educational and professional activities might not be enough.

Despite the fact that scholars and practitioners understand that this is necessary for a modern person to develop this ability, the issue has not been practically developed and is not reflected in educational programmes of secondary professional institutions.

Purposefully organized learner-centered training aimed at making students aware of their mental states and their ability to regulate them will improve the effectiveness of educational, professional and professional activities and help resolve difficult situations with minimum damage.

3. Research Questions

So far, scientists have not come to agree on a common view of the contents and structure of self-regulation of individual mental states. Mental states do not have any specific characteristics and this concept is vaguely and ambiguously defined. Moreover, there are hardly any research works focused on the problem of mental self-regulation of students in secondary professional institutions.

The problem of mental states was first posed in Russian psychological science by Levitov (1964) in the middle of the 20th century but to this day this area of psychology remains underdeveloped. Prokhorov (2009) and Gabdreeva (2014) note possible reasons for the insufficient amount of research in this area: first, mental states are somewhere between mental processes and mental properties which makes

their differentiation difficult; secondly, mental states as a system are considered as multilevel, multifaceted, multifunctional and have a wide range of manifestation which makes it difficult to distinguish between them (Prokhorov, 2009).

Levitov understands a mental state as an independent manifestation of human psyche, always accompanied by external signs that have a transient, dynamic nature which cannot be considered to be psychic processes or personality traits, expressed most often in emotions affecting a person's mental activities and associated with cognitive activities, with the volitional sphere and a personality in general (Levitov, 1964).

Prokhorov (2009) developed the concept of the semantic regulation of mental states, the relevance of which is determined by the fact that the role of consciousness and its components in mental regulation is still underexplored. The concept postulates that external factors of the environment affect the mental state of a person but this influence is mediated by a person's consciousness. From the point of view of the author of this concept, the semantic organization of consciousness determines the intensity and nature of the influence of life situations on a person. When an objective life situation "meets" with the characteristics of one's consciousness (such as personal meaning, values, attitudes, etc.) it transforms into a subjective image of that situation in a person's mind and this in turn determines the attitude of a person to this situation as a whole and to the specific features of one's mental state emerging from it (Prokhorov, 2009).

When speaking of mental self-regulation we mean a systematically organized process of a person's internal psychic activity that provides monitoring, evaluation and correction of mental states, accompanied by external signs that have a transient, dynamic nature which cannot be considered to be psychic processes or personality traits, expressed most often in emotions affecting a person's mental activities and associated with cognitive activities, with the volitional sphere and a personality in general.

In this study, we followed the views of Levitov (1964) on the classification of mental states. He identifies emotional states; volitional states; cognitive (intellectual) states. What is more, he does not deny the possibility of distinguishing between different mental states depending on the activities that they follow (Levitov, 1964). This kind of subdivision does not intend to replace the accepted classification but aims to complement it. Since communication is the main condition for the mental development of a person, we consider the role of communicative activities in this study.

Based on this all we have identified the following four criteria for assessing the effectiveness of actions aimed at developing the ability of students of secondary professional institutions to self-regulate their mental states in order to ensure their non-violent attitude to the world and to themselves: the ability to self-regulate emotional states; to self-regulate volitional states; to self-regulate cognitive states and to self-regulate mental states in communication. Additionally students' knowledge of methods and techniques of mental self-regulation have been assessed along with their ability to apply this knowledge in different contexts.

The problem of scientific substantiation of psychological and pedagogical conditions for the formation of the ability to self-regulate mental states of future professionals engaged in the process of vocational training is very important and relevant today in view of the fact that knowledge and understanding of these conditions help achieve true professionalism.

Drawing on the studies by Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1998), Gabdreeva (1981; 2014), Gabdreeva & Yusupov (2012; 2013), Kiselevskaya (2014), Petrova (2010a, 2010b), Prokhorov (2004; 2017), Cherkevich (2007), Yusupov (2012) and others we came to the conclusion that the formation of the ability of students to self-regulate their mental states will be most effective if the development of this ability will be carried out through learner-centered classes organized within the framework of a special course; they should be designed in accordance with the typology of mental states (emotional, cognitive, volitional, social) and in accordance with the structure of the mental self-regulation process (reflection on one's actual state and visualization of the desired state, actualization of the necessary motivation, use of psycho-regulatory techniques and reflection on any change in one's state); the development of the ability for mental self-regulation should be conducted through enabling students to learn specific techniques which will help them stay focused and driven during their activity and achieve mental recovery during the period of relaxation; psychic- and psycho-physical self-regulation needs to be continually met (autogenous training, self-massage, aromatherapy, meditation, breathing exercises, art therapy, color therapy, music therapy, visualization, affirmation, etc.).

Lerner-centered classes in which the main goal is to develop a learner's personality gradually help learners develop their own mechanisms for self-regulation and self-development.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to help students of secondary professional institutions develop ability for mental self-regulation through organizing learner-centered classes within the framework of a special course while providing special psychological and pedagogical conditions

5. Research Methods

The pedagogical experiment consisted of three stages: preliminary assessment, formative and control stages. At the preliminary assessment and control stages of our pedagogical experiment, the following diagnostic methods were used in accordance with the set of predetermined criteria: the students' ability to self-regulate their emotional states was examined with the use of Boyko's method of assessing uncontrollable emotional sensitivity (excitability); the ability to self-regulate one's volitional states was assessed with the use Zverkova and Eidman's questionnaire "The assessment of volitional self-regulation" and Bogdanova and Posokhova's questionnaire "Self-regulation of laziness manifestation"; the ability to self-regulate cognitive (intellectual) states was evaluated with the use of Bourdon-Anfimov's correction test (the diagnostics of stability and attention concentration); the ability to self-regulate one's mental states in communication was evaluated with the use of Boyko's method of assessing interference in making emotional contacts along with Nikiforov, Vasilyev and Firsova's methods of measuring self-control in the emotional sphere, activity and behavior (social self-control); the knowledge of students of secondary professional institutions concerning the techniques and methods of mental self-regulation and their ability to apply this knowledge were assessed with the use of the original questionnaire that we created for this study.

The experiment was conducted at the Ishim Multidisciplinary Technical School involving the first year students from the department of "Technology of food services" and "Technology of production and processing of agricultural products". In each group there were 25 first year students (16-17 years old).

The estimation of the shift in values of the investigated ability was carried out with the help of Fisher's φ* criterion. The equivalence of the compared groups at the preliminary assessment stage of the experiment was established with the use of the Mann-Whitney U test

6. Findings

We started by assessing students' knowledge of the methods and techniques for mental self-regulation and their ability to apply them. After conducting our survey we found that students in both groups indicated that they were aware of trying to manage their mental state when being under stress, experiencing extreme fatigue or when working on a high-stakes task such as sitting an examination or participating in a competition. The most common self-regulation techniques used by students were the following: music therapy, breathing exercises, self-massage and autosuggestion. All of the students gave an affirmative response when asked if they needed to develop specific skills to manage their mental state in future. Students indicated that these skills would be useful for further study, work life, communications with peers and in personal relationships.

At the first stage of our study with the use of Nikiforov, Vasil'ev and Firsova's method for assessing the ability for emotional, social and activity-related self-control we found that in the first group 8 students (32%), and in the second group 7 students (28%) demonstrated low levels of aptitude for self-control in the emotional sphere; 12 (48%) and 10 (40%) had a moderate level; 5 (20%) and 6 (24%) had high levels of aptitude for emotional self-control. High levels of aptitude for self-control in activities in the first group was shown by 8 (32%) subjects, in the second group – by 12 (48%); 17 (68%) and 13 (52%) demonstrated moderate levels. High levels of aptitude for social self-control in the first group was demonstrated by only 2 people (8%), in the second group the number of students was 3 (12%); a moderate level was demonstrated by 11 (44%) and 12 students (48%) and a low one by 12 (48%) and 10 students (40%).

With the use of Boyko's method for assessing how much emotions interfere with establishing contacts and maintaining relationships we found the following: only for 4 students (16%) in the first group and for 6 (24%) in the second group emotions do not interfere with their relationships with partners and do not affect their communications negatively; 4 people (16%) in each group indicated that they experience some emotional problems in their daily communication; 10 people (40%) in each group revealed that emotions sometimes complicate their relationships with partners; and 7 respondents (28%) in the first group and 5 (20%) in the second group noted that emotions significantly affect their lives and prevent them from establishing positive relationships with people.

After assessing the levels of uncontrollable emotional sensitivity (excitability) in the two groups 18 students (72%) in the first group and 21 (84%) in the second group showed signs of impulsivity.

When studying the levels of volition in the two groups we assessed the levels of students` ability to manage their behavior in different situations, the ability to consciously control their motivations, states and actions. The majority of students in both groups (80% in the first and 84% in the second)

demonstrated good composure, moderate self-confidence, a sense of duty, stable motivation and realistic world views. All in all they were able to effectively reflect on their personal aspirations, systematically fulfill their desires, evenly distribute volitional efforts and exercise control over their actions and maintain a strong pro-social orientation. There is a relatively small but real chance that these people can develop anxiety and internal tensions stemming from the desire to totally control every aspect of their lives and not being able to tolerate any spontaneity. Low levels of volition were observed in 20% of students in the first group and 28% in the second group – these people are sensitive, emotionally unstable, vulnerable and insecure. Their ability to reflect is low and the levels of pro-activeness are usually low. They are characterized by impulsivity and instability of intentions. This can stem from both immaturity and from a very complicated personality which is not equipped with the ability to reflect and self-control.

When the level of self-regulation in the context of common situations of laziness was assessed both groups demonstrated very low results in relation to those situations when there is no urgent objective need to take action.

With the use of Bourdon-Anfimov's correction test we determined the levels of attention concentration among the students. The overwhelming majority of students (64% in the first group and 71% in the second group) showed low attention concentration, the rest (36% and 29% respectively) demonstrated levels above the average. This means that students cannot fully focus on their work (on a particular object or an activity), they can manage their cognitive mental states poorly.

Thus, at the first stage of our pedagogical experiment we found that students of secondary educational institutions are familiar with and able to apply such techniques as music therapy, breathing exercises, self-massage and self-hypnosis. The ability for self-regulating volitional states in both groups is moderate; our respondents demonstrated average and below average levels of self-control in the emotional sphere and the sphere of communication. The ability to self-regulate cognitive states among students is characterized by weak attention stability. The ability of most students to independently plan and manage one's activities is underdeveloped.

In order to test the hypothesis of this study (specific psychological and pedagogical conditions are needed in order to develop the abilities of students to self-regulate their mental states) we designed a special course, the implementation of which will help achieve the following:

1) students will get familiar with the typology of mental states and the structure of the mental self-regulation process;

2) students will realize the importance of the ability to self-regulate their mental states;

3) students will learn the techniques of psychic and psychophysical self-regulation;

4) students will develop deeper self-awareness and stronger capacity for overcoming emotional, cognitive, volitional, behavioral and communicative problems.

The course structure was comprised of 16 learner-centered practical classes. Two-hour sessions were held weekly. The complex of learner-centered classes was designed in such a way that it was possible to give each session in separation from the whole course and to replace individual exercises in the course with other exercises similar in their purpose.

The following course outcomes were expected:

- an improved ability for self-regulating emotional states;

- an improved ability for self-regulating volitional states;

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- an improved ability for self-regulating cognitive (intellectual) states;

- an improved ability for self-regulating mental states related to communication;

- better awareness of techniques and methods of mental self-regulation;

- an improved ability to practically apply the learned techniques and methods of mental self-regulation.

The design of our learner-centered classes was based on the ideas of modern psychotherapy, elements of self-training, meditative exercises, psychological exercises, exercises that form the ability to self-regulate in a certain area (behavioral, intellectual, emotional-volitional), art-therapeutic techniques.

In order to achieve these results the following methods and practices of active socio-psychological training were used: role-playing and business games; interactive mini-lectures; work in small groups and pairs using handouts; case-study discussions and situational tasks; discussions of students' experiences; creativity-based methods. The forms of work alternated depending on the tasks (individual working, work in pairs, work in small groups or as a whole group).

The structure of the developed course included the following units:

1. Self-assessment of one's ability to self-regulate one's mental states.

2. Learning the typology of mental states, the structure of the mental self-regulation process and a range of various self-regulation methods.

3. Practice sessions to help students repeatedly apply newly acquired methods.

4. Final self-assessment.

5. Reflection.

Our research methodology (Fisher's angular transformation) allowed us to trace a significant shift in the ability of students in the experimental group to self-regulate their mental states as a result of conducting our learner-centered course whereas the control group demonstrated no significant changes ($p \leq 0,05$).

7. Conclusion

Thus, our finding indicated the following: (1) first-year students of secondary professional institutions know and apply a number of methods to regulate their mental states (listening to music, self-massage, affirmations (verbal self-hypnosis patterns), breathing exercises) but their behavior is mostly characterized by a lack of conscious understanding of the scientific basis underlining these techniques and methods; (2) the abilities of first-year students to self-regulate various mental states are not developed well enough; they cannot effectively plan and manage their activities, use internal resources to achieve their plans.

Secondly, the development of students' abilities for mental self-regulation can be achieved through educational activities when the following psycho-pedagogical conditions are fulfilled: the organization of a special learner-centered course; exploring the typology of mental states (emotional, cognitive, volitional, social) and the structure of the mental self-regulation process (through reflecting on one's current state, visualizing the desired state, working on one's motivation, using psycho-regulatory techniques, reflecting on any change); training students and helping them get familiar with various

psychic and psychophysical self-regulation techniques using the methods and practices of active socio-psychological education.

Developing students' ability to self-regulate their mental states improves the effectiveness of educational and professional activities; helps student achieve and maintain harmonious personal and work relationships; influences the behavior of students positively and prevents them prom acting violently towards the world and towards oneself.

Acknowledgments

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