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SEMINAR-CONVERGENCE IN TEACHING HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

The article proposes the procedure of seminar-convergence arrangement for the History of Psychology classes. Convergence consists of focusing students' attention on one general problem by means of special arrangement of the class. This method shows teaching efficiency. A seminar-convergence involves all students due to the pre-determined functions of the seminar participants. Seminar-convergence helps to develop students' ability for critical thinking and forms subjective position in educational situations.

Observing students during the seminar-convergence makes it possible to draw the conclusion that such a seminar encourages activity, individualism and creativity. In educational activity the competencies are usually formed within a specific educational situation. In this case the point is that the efficiency of an educational situation is provided by the interactive dialog, which includes all participants of the seminar-convergence.

Main purpose of such seminars is not only to focus attention on common issues, but also the preservation of the active dialog within the studied issues. The seminar is based on the didactical tendency of Socratic dialogs. The main task of teaching lies in teaching students how to think, get into debates and discuss problems. Simple accumulation of knowledge in the information age loses its significance.

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Keywords: Seminar-convergence, dialog, history of psychology, efficient method.



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1. Introduction

The history of psychology is interesting to study but difficult to teach, as it is eclectic, it combines many different theories often contradicting each other. The course of the History of Psychology is one of the most important things for psychology students. Studying the development of psychological theories and analyzing works from different time periods forms the system of the student's professional knowledge. The History of Psychology as a university subject leads to the integration of psychological theories into students' consciousness and understanding for students of the logics of psychology development as an independent science.

On the one hand, the professor wants to give students the maximum possible knowledge in the History of Psychology; on the other hand, there is a huge amount of information regarding psychological theories and "schools" on the Internet. Nowadays, for modern students, the purpose of knowledge accumulating is not relevant. Competencies, personal qualities, and ability to think and propose creative solutions for different situations are in high demand nowadays. This fact also changes the position of university professors: instead of transferring knowledge which is easily available and provided in huge amounts through various informational sources, the professor has to teach students to think and develop subjective qualities of the professional. When teaching theoretical courses, due to the availability of information in the internet-resources, it becomes a difficult didactic task to encourage students to be academically-orientated. When teaching theoretical courses of psychology (including the history of psychology) we face such difficulties that students are not active, they do not want to think, and prepare for the classes only topically. Availability and diversity of informational recourses causes passivity, when the whole preparation is a turn over as the reproduction of the text from the Internet. Here we have a question: which methods of history of psychology teaching could teach students to think, to discuss, and to read works of great psychologists?

In our practice we use a method developed by ourselves of organizing a seminar-convergence, which is described in this article in the example of teaching the history of psychology. To determine the efficiency of seminar-convergence we compared two different groups. In the first group we performed seminar-convergences for 10 weeks. This was the experimental group. The second group is control one. For them we carried out traditional seminars on the same themes of the "History of psychology" course. Seminar-convergence is the interactive method of teaching.

2. Problem Statement

The necessity of interactive methods in teaching is mentioned by many authors. For example, Lai & Hong (2015) carried out their research in New Zealand and showed that digital technologies do not provide efficiency of teaching and cognitive development of the students. On the contrary, universities are trying to develop new methods and ways related to students' critical thinking development, motivation for studying, and expression of interest to the contents of education. Students prefer dialog but not the monolog, they are not interested in information itself, because it is available in the digital courses. Students prefer a combination of traditional lectures and lectures involving methods of cooperation in the process of solving educational tasks. In particular, students are interested in discussions in small groups because in such way they could focus on one or two main issues. This is described by Cavanagh (2011). It is very important for

the professor to provide emotional comfort to the students in small groups. According to Micari and Pazos (2014) students should feel comfortable even if their level of knowledge is lower than level of the others in the group. Nowadays small tuition groups are a phenomenon for education of all levels. Nevertheless the study showed that work in small groups does not always give positive results for the category of students who are less trained and feel nervous when participating in the work of small groups, who prefer to keep silent and not to take part in the discussion. Critical thinking development, which is necessary for modern people, could be achieved only by means of active dialog. So we need to create such situations in the educational process which should exercise the activity of students and readiness to engage in a dialog.

Dialogs enable students to study the material. This was proved by many empirical studies in the field of education. It is well known that active studying improves cognitive skills. Research conducted by Stolk and Harari (2014) shows that cognitive activity is connected with a students' motivation. High motivation in a considerable degree leads to the application of critical strategies of thinking.

Even in the conditions of virtual environment, dialog and feedback are always important. Research works by Jones and Gorra (2013) show the necessity of the feedback for improvement of a students' academic performance and studies the efficiency of feedback application by means of virtual learning environment, satisfaction degree through the feedback in education, and its compliance with students' expectations. This underlines the importance of dialog in educational process.

Many Russian publications are also devoted to the problem of teaching efficiency. From the point of view of organizing seminar-convergence, the most interesting for us is positional teaching developed by Veraksa (1994). Positional seminar is arranged as a discussion of the lecture contents. The student group is divided into subgroups with definite functional tasks expressed in the positions of participation in the seminar (Veraksa, 1994).

Our research presupposes application of a definite scheme of seminar-convergence arrangement which provides involvement of all participants into the discussion. The main idea of seminar-convergence is that participants could not just present at the seminar, but should take part in the discussion of the general theme. During the seminar each student should express their own opinion on the main aspects of the issue under discussion. This improves individualism and self-expression of a student. In one of the studies carried out by Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Jiao (2009) it was proved that specific individualism in small groups provides the efficiency of research methodology in course studying. It is empirically proved that groups consisting of postgraduates, possessing high level of individual orientation, are capable of articles in critical analysis and get high grade for the course.

Under modern conditions of transformation of traditional forms of education within the framework of humanitarian disciplines, issues regarding the means providing development of thinking, formation of subjective position of a student in the educational process become particularly urgent. Improvement, in the forms of seminars, while studying theoretical disciplines becomes the required condition of teaching, as it is obvious that nowadays there is high demand for those specialists who are able to think and possess problem-solving ability.

3. Research Questions

What is the degree of seminar-convergence efficiency in teaching?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study is to determine the degree of seminar-convergence efficiency in teaching.

According to the purpose, we formulate following tasks of the study:

1. To develop a strategy and the rules of leading of seminar convergence based on example of course “History of psychology”.
2. To provide the seminars with identical topic in experimental (seminar convergence) and control group (traditional seminar) and to compare an efficiency of learning of students.
3. To develop a variety of test tasks and evaluation indicators which allow to determine a level of learning the given topic in course “History of psychology”.
4. To define the statistical differences in learning level in experimental and control group.

5. Research Methods

We developed a method of seminar arrangement based on a special scenario. We called it seminar-convergence and apply it as one of the forms of teaching the History of Psychology. The term “convergence” originated from a Latin word (convergo) that means contingency and integration. Selection of this term for description for interactive didactic technology of History of Psychology class arrangement is associated with the main purpose of seminar-convergence – integration, attention focusing, and intellectual work of students devoted to the general discussion issue, theme of the seminar, is to focus seminar participants on the definite subject matter. Seminar-convergence suggests that the professor and each student attending the seminar are focused on the general issue subject to the discussion. Organization of the seminar-convergence proposed by us as a new form of class arrangement should be carried out as follows:

1. The professor should preliminary propose the theme of the seminar and list of reports that should be prepared on this theme.
2. As per the proposed list, students should prepare reports. The report is considered successful when the speaker was asked at least two questions. Absence of questions means that either the report was not interesting, or the theme is not understood by the listeners.
3. In case the speaker is not able to answer additional questions, the report is considered unsuccessful. Such situation is quite real because students often do not know the presented material good, especially when all the data is just downloaded from the internet in a hurry.
4. A key position is also taken by the student who asks the question to the reporter. A question requiring just repetition of the above mentioned data is not considered as the additional question. Participants of the seminar should ask such questions which suppose discussion and thinking. For example such question as “What is Sigmund Freud’s birth city?” is not considered as an additional question on the seminar-convergence. And such question as: “What could you say regarding the Oedipus complex of children of the World War II generation, who stayed in single-parent families without fathers?” requires discussion as it contains the problem.
5. On the next stage of seminar-convergence it is the speaker who should ask the question on the contents of her report. This question should help to determine the degree of understanding of the presented

report by the participants of the seminar – other students of the group. In such case the questioned should be answered by the student chosen by the professor.

6. Findings

6.1. Results

Let's analyze the fragment of the seminar-convergence on the theme "Origination and development of the Lev Vygotsky's theory in the history of Russian psychology". This theme was studied by students of two groups studying in the specialization "Psychology of Education". One of these groups (experimental group) attended seminar-convergence the other (control group) – traditional seminar. The number of students in each group is 25. In addition, it is worth noting that the experimental group has already attended 9 seminars according to the method of seminar-convergence before the main seminar.

Students of both groups were offered to prepare 3 reports on the given theme of the seminar "Origination and development of the Lev Vygotsky's theory in the history of Russian psychology":

1. Background for origination of Vygotsky's theory.
2. Symbolic and instrumental content of culture in Vygotsky's theory.
3. Impact of Vygotsky's ideas on defectology and developmental psychology.

Students prepare reports for the seminar on the basis of the proposed themes. During preparing of report, the students can use the scientific articles. For example, for the given topic the articles in journals "Voprosy psychologii" and "Psychological journal" should be taken into account, where there is a part "History of psychology" (Anikina, 2009; Bayanova, 2013a). After presenting the reports, the seminar participants from the group ask questions.

The following questions were asked after the first report:

- "Why has behaviorism become a background for creation of cultural and historical concept by Vygotsky?"
 - "A number of researchers think that the image of Hamlet in Vygotsky's works is a key for creation the cultural and historical psychology. For example, one article specifies Vygotsky's method within the meaning of a personality through the symbol of Hamlet (Bayanova, 2013b). What does the impact of the Shakespeare's character image on Lev Vygotsky's world view involve?"

Both questions asked to the reporter require mediation both during the question formulation and during answering it. Only the thorough knowledge of the Vygotsky's theory origins makes it possible for students to understand that the culture impact determines the content of a person's mind. The question of the third reporter on the theme: "Implementation of Lev Vygotsky's ideas in defectology and developmental psychology", addressed to the student group appeared interesting. It sounds as follows: "How does the secondary defect appear in children with musculoskeletal disorders in case of infantile cerebral paralysis according to Vygotsky's (1995, 1998) views? The first defect is an arms and legs movement disorder, but the mind is affected while the brain itself is safe?" This question also requires the understanding of the main theses of Vygotsky's theory. Restriction of movement makes the perception development difficult, and this simple cognitive function being incompletely formed in early childhood then affects the mind as a whole – memory, thinking, speech.

At the beginning of the article we claimed that the seminar-convergence is more efficient as a method of conducting the classes on the history of psychology rather than a traditional seminar. In order to check this statement, we carried out the comparison testing in both groups of students – in the first experimental group where the seminar-convergence was conducted, and in the second control group with the traditional seminar.

The tasks, in which students should choose one correct answer out of the proposed three variants, were used during the testing:

1. Vygotsky (1987) thinks a mechanism of environment effect that changes a child's mind by:

- a) assimilation;
- b) accommodation;
- c) interiorization.

2. Signs in the cultural and historical concept:

- a) are developed by a child during the socio-dramatic play;
- b) are acquired by a child during communication with an adult person;
- c) the question of a source of a cultural sign origination is disputable.

3. The correlation of training and development according to Vygotsky (1998) is as follows:

- a) training follows development successively, obeying the laws of biological maturation;
- b) training precedes development and leads it;
- c) correlation of training and development is determined by the practical conditions of a child development in the environment.

4. Sign is:

- a) artificial education used for communication between people;
- b) drawing, symbol, mark created in a person's imagination;
- c) any material perceived reality element having the definite meaning and being used for storage and transmission of some perfect information on what lies outside this material education.

5. Social situation of development is:

- a) all events of a child's social interaction with adults;
- b) facts of social environment influencing a child's becoming a personality;
- c) relations between a child and his social environment peculiar to this age period.

6. Zone of proximal development is:

- a) zone of mental processes being at formation stage (determined by the tasks that a child solves with the help of an adult);
- b) area of tasks that arouse a child's interest (determined by the tasks that a child solves by himself);
- c) set of complicated tasks, solving of which produces the effect of the intelligence formation.

7. Systematic structure of consciousness is:

- a) obedience of all mental functions to the dominant function at the specific age period;
- b) the structure of consciousness, wherein the connection between its elements is found;

c) the structure of consciousness, wherein the cause and effect relationship of the world phenomena is reflected.

8. Higher mental function is:

a) function, which masters all other functions, formed in the period of logical thinking establishment;

b) function formed within the lifetime of a person, which has arbitrariness and awareness; this function develops due to development of mental means by a child;

c) function, which determines the development of a child's personality sphere; this function can be different in different children at different periods.

The test includes 20 tasks in total. We put the correct answers in italics. According to the test tasks, they can only be solved with understanding, not remembering the seminar theme.

In the group, which had the seminar-convergence, the knowledge appeared higher than in the control group where students studied the topic through the traditional seminar form.

The study assessments are given in the table.

Table 01. Knowledge testing results of students in the control and experimental groups in the history of psychology

Levels of tasks performance	Experimental group	Control group
High	75%	0%
Medium	25%	87%
Low	0%	13%

Apart from calculations of student knowledge based on the test performance level, we calculated the student test using the SPSS program. This index equals to, which shows the differences of two groups based on the index of test performance. This index is statistically significant, which proves the fact that the efficiency of seminar-convergence implementation gives a higher digestion result.

6.2. Discussion

Results of this research strongly indicate the efficiency of the seminar-convergence in teaching the history of psychology to students. However, we are interested in what competencies are developed by such a method of seminars executions. The final objective of teaching is the knowledge digestion and competencies formation. In this case it appears to us that the seminar-convergence forms the competence in the sphere of independent cognitive activity when a student digests the means of knowledge acquisition from the different information sources. Participants of the seminar-convergence can be only students who know the material and who are familiar with background material, which triggers the serious preparation to the lesson.

Seminar theme related to the study of Vygotsky's works (1987, 1995, 1998) is important for the future psychologists of education, that's why in this case the axiological competency is formed. This is a competency in the worldview sphere, it is related to the student's value orientations, his ability to see and understand the world around, orientate in it, realize his role and designation, be able to find purpose and sense of his actions and deeds and make decisions. This competency provides the mechanism of a person

with self-determination in situations of educational and other activities. Individual educational route of a student depends on it.

Observation over students during the lesson and calculations on the basis of the performed test show that the seminar-convergence contributes to the efficient lesson theme digestion

7. Conclusion

The experience of the seminar-convergence execution in the lessons of history of psychology showed that this method improves the quality of material digestion in the course “History of psychology” essentially.

Observing students during the seminar-convergence makes it possible to draw the conclusion that such a seminar encourages activity, individualism and creativity. In educational activity the competencies are usually formed within a specific educational situation. In this case the point is that the efficiency of an educational situation is provided by the interactive dialog, which includes all participants of the seminar-convergence.

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