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**STRUCTURING TEXT ACTIVITIES OF STUDENTS AS THE
FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE-COGNITIVE
PROCESS**

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Abstract

The article argues for the need of targeted structuring of text activities of primary- and middle-school students as the foundation of the communicative-cognitive process in light of requirements of the informational era of today, and signals the importance of developing theoretical foundations of training schoolchildren in a system of skills of text perception, interpretation and creation, with text being a communicative unit of the highest order. Text activities are regarded as the principal area of students' cognitive and verbal-and-cogitative activity, and improvement of those skills is a major didactic problem today, which necessitates serious work in that area, taking into account achievements of Russian and international didactics, methodology of speech development, psycholinguistics, linguo-sociopsychology, theory of text. Based on the analysis of Russian and international practices in the area of structuring of text activities, scientific observation and generalization of teaching experience, the author has identified and described main didactic conditions that can foster texts in different styles and different types of speech analysis and text production skills in schoolchildren with the aim of developing and carrying out cognitive and verbal-and-cogitative activity of students, which is necessary for successful execution of teaching objectives, for the achievement of short-term and strategic academic pursuits in today's information-educational environment.

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Keywords: Text activities, communicative-cognitive process, cognitive activity.



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1. Introduction

The educational situation today is characterized by global changes occurring in the information-educational environment, driven by its expansion and development. In that respect, didactics today finds itself faced with new requirements. At the current stage of development of the theory of learning, the focus of attention of educators is shifting from objects of school studies to mechanisms and methods of learning, from knowledge accumulation to mastering the experience backed by a meaningful system of relevant concepts, which “are not learned by the child, are not memorized, but are generated and added up by putting a greatest strain on his or her own mind” (Vygotskij, 2016, p.201). Thus, the main goal of the learning process is perceived by didactics of today as development of the individual (Bassey, 2010, p.186). Since individuals fulfill themselves in society, one of the most important individual features is the ability to be an active participant of the communicative-cognitive process. One most important requirement for a participant of that process is to be skillful in text activities, or a “system of actions based on knowledge, abilities and skills that help create texts, perceive and interpret them” (Bolotnova, 2009, p.33).

2. Problem Statement

One of the core didactic problems in today’s educational situation is activization of cognitive and verbal-and-cogitative activity of students aimed at the implementation of specific teaching objectives, achievement of specific academic pursuits, both short-term and strategic ones. It is in text activities that the cognitive and verbal-and-cogitative activity of schoolchildren manifests itself to the fullest extent; therefore, serious work in that area is required, based on achievements of Russian and international didactics and methodology of speech development, psycholinguistics, linguo-sociopsychology, theory of text — all those academic disciplines that are focused on studying text perception, interpretation and generation, as well as on how to teach text activities.

3. Research Questions

Leontyev (1974) noted that the “concept of ‘activities’ is necessarily linked to the concept of ‘motive.’ There are no activities without a motive” (p. 12). Learner-centered studies are fertile ground for successful building of the motivational basis of text activities of schoolchildren as activities that ensure an effective communicative-cognitive process, and studies of that type argue for a child’s right to individual development that does not contradict his/her inclinations and interests. Of primary importance here are conditions (driven by learner-centered teaching) of structuring of text activities, such as conservation and support of a child’s individuality, building a basis for the realization of his/her creative capabilities and ensuring his/her success, making arrangements for learning cooperation with classmates, keeping a democratic style of relations between schoolchildren and the teacher (Vinogradova, 2017), targeted building of communicative-cognitive motives (Uskova, 2016). Studies in creative approaches to teaching creation of written utterances carried out by Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, and Wilkinson (2004) confirm that the learner-centered approach is one of the most effective for the purpose.

4. Purpose of the Study

Text, as a communicative unit of the highest order, is not only the result but also an object of targeted communicative-cognitive activities, and one of the main objects of those text activities is the communicative intent of all the parties involved in communication, i.e. not semantic information in general, but semantic information cemented by intention, communicative-cognitive intent (Dridze, 2009). It is in the willingness and ability to perceive and interpret an author's intention realized in a text and in the ability to realize one's intention in a speech production characterized by wholeness, cohesiveness and relative completeness that the personality core of an actor of the communicative-cognitive process manifests itself. It is important to note here that a child becomes an actor in any kind of activities only if he/she is able to display independence in finding ways of addressing tasks at hand and in setting tasks (Vygotskij, 2016), including text perception and interpretation — as transition from the external meaning of the text to its deep sense (Luriya, 1979), which requires complex independent internal work of the reader, — and the process of text production, in which a student realizes their capabilities as a linguistic personality, an equal participant in oral communication. That independence is ensured by sticking to a set of didactic conditions, of which the most important are structuring analytical and productive text activities in their interrelation and interdependence, and following the principle of continuity and succession in structuring text activities at Russian language classes (Aleksandrova, Dobrotina, Gosteva, Vasilevyh, & Uskova, 2019).

5. Research Methods

As a result of studying academic literature, analysis of Russian and international practices in the area of structuring of text activities, scientific observation and generalization of teaching experiences, the argument of the fundamental role of a system of text actions in successful communicative-cognitive activities has been confirmed, and the specifics of text activities compared to conventional work related to the development of speaking skills of students at Russian language classes has been defined. Conclusions were made regarding the need of interrelated structuring and development of analytical and productive text activities, implementation of the learner-centered approach, of the principle of continuity and succession for the purpose of effective structuring of text activities in teaching the Russian language with due consideration of requirements regarding the level of education in today's information-educational environment.

6. Findings

When in the course of analytical text activities a schoolchild begins an inner dialog with the author of the text, and starts to give his/her arguments to back up or disprove the author's viewpoint, bringing in his/her background knowledge, starts to juxtapose new information with known data on the subject and synthesize, generalize those data, and think independently how new information could be used in productive text activities, when in the course of text creation a schoolchild wants to specify, explain, explicate his/her idea, establish more obvious links between that idea and other, more general, thoughts, to make a text more complete in order to get his/her message across to the audience in an optimal form

that facilitates perception and understanding, one can speak about emergence of sense-making motives that impart some personal meaning to the activities.

However, at the initial stages of structuring of text activities, it is the teacher who works out a system of motives for the performance of text actions of varied degrees of complexity, and creates motivation for text activities (Neugebauer, 2017), subject to a number of factors, which include the stage of speech development and psychophysiological capabilities of schoolchildren, as well as specific features of class situations. Importantly, the process of structuring of text activities, teacher-performed actualization of situational incentives of students to carry out text actions must be of systemic nature in order to be able to ensure gradual transition to steady motives, provided the students simultaneously absorb those ready-made intentions and goals, which they must progressively transform from being borrowed and acknowledged (by virtue of certain reasons) as necessary into those that operate regardless of external factors and have been inwardly accepted.

One special complication in creating motivation lies in the fact that, according to studies of Elkonin (1998), oral speech, both in a dialog and in a monolog, is much more immediately motivated than writing, because motives of written utterances are not backed up in the course of text creation by external signals and impacts — for instance, in the form of the interlocutor's remarks or the audience's reactions, or the writer's being aware of the audience's need for the product of his/her activities. Consequently, motivation of schoolchildren in text creation must be much more solid than the motives driving oral speech. In this light, building internal, inward motivation based on entrenched notions of text-building laws and the need to develop a theme and express the main idea in a perfectly structured form, as well as on skills built at initial stages of teaching text activities in collaboration with and under the guidance of the teacher, becomes especially significant, and analytical text activities, as a means of critical evaluation and creation of an idea of a perfect text, are recognized as essential (Dressler & Beaugrande, 1981; Titscher, Wodak, Meyer, & Vetter, 1998).

The planning stage has always been emphasized in psycholinguistics and didactics. At that stage, students, under the teacher's guidance and in collaboration with the teacher and classmates or independently, create the foothold for the implementation of their intention — first and foremost, in the form of a plan. In the course of their studies, Graham and Perin (2007) arrived at the conclusion that the most effective strategy here is to create a text based on a preliminary plan and subject to subsequent review and reworking. However, according to findings of Zhinkin (1998), the role of a preliminary plan, whatever its form (brief or detailed), could be overestimated, as shown by a host of pedagogic studies in the area and multiyear disputes about its most effective forms. A simple plan that lists only the main sections of a text precludes synthesis of preceding elements of the text with succeeding ones, and an overcomplicated and detailed plan that represents a reduced text is a fixed thing, therefore it “immobilizes the text and creative work in the course of essay writing. An idea that can occur in the course of writing is often a thing that was not stipulated in the plan” (Zhinkin, 1998, pp. 317-318). A preliminary plan, Zhinkin thinks, must, first and foremost, articulate the principal idea and plot main approaches to it, map out ways of its development, and, furthermore, it must trace the interrelation of text elements and transition from one of them to another. Thus, the conception stage overlaps with the planning stage. Moreover, to avoid putting restrictions on creative activity, planning continues even when the conception

is realized; so, the plan can be revised: micro-themes can be expanded or collapsed, the order of the plan items can be changed, some points can be replaced, included or excluded.

Realizing their intention according to the outlined plan, students not only extract appropriate linguistic means from the language system, but they synthesize them within the framework of minimal text units, which, in turn, they bind together to form parts of the composition building the text macrostructure. The principles of continuity and succession dictate that students should, first in collaboration with the teacher, and, afterwards, in the course of independent activities, select and use key words and phrases as verbal props and, simultaneously, semantic milestones, which are necessary for the implementation of their intention, expression of the main idea of the text. As they implement their intention, students perform not only productive but also receptive text activities, analyzing already built parts of the text as the starting point for further development of the intent, unfolding the idea, on the one hand, and as an object of critical evaluation from the standpoint of requirements for the content and form of text units, in their correlation to the general theme, main idea and text composition, on the other. Thus, the stage of analysis and critical evaluation of the created text overlaps with the stage of the implementation of the intention, and continues after the text is completed (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Readiness for self-control, the ability to exercise it has always been regarded as one of the main factors of successful structuring of productive text activities, and in today's information-educational environment, when the ability to perform universal learning activities, including regulatory ones, is of paramount importance, when a surge in information flows requires a critical approach and evaluation of authenticity of received information, it becomes especially relevant (Bassey, 2010). At the self-control stage, schoolchildren proceed from the competencies and skills acquired in the course of analytical text activities, using necessary text actions that they have learned how to perform (Britt, Goldman, & Rouet, 2012), and one of important criteria of evaluation of a created text, alongside its relevance to the theme and adequacy in terms of expression of the idea, as well as logic, coherence, consistency and completeness, is correspondence to the audience's expectations, interests and capacities. In that aspect, evaluation of a created text becomes possible if schoolchildren have skills on which reader's activities are based, and if they are able to imagine the reader's perspective. Once again, this reaffirms a solid link and interdependence between analytical and productive text activities as the foundation of the communicative-cognitive process and the need to structure those activities for students in a targeted manner during all their years at school, taking into account requirements of today's informational era.

7. Conclusion

According to scientific findings of Vygotsky (2016), the school age is a sensitive period with respect to those subjects that are based on deliberate and arbitrary functions to the fullest extent. Among those subjects, we list text activities, teaching of which creates optimal conditions for the development of mechanisms of communicative-cognitive activities, of verbal and logical creative thinking, which is characterized by creation of a new product and transformations in the course of cognitive activities leading to its creation, self-regulation of consciousness and formation of a creative linguistic personality ready for effective interaction in society, capable of "transforming their speech into text, changing their speech behavior fundamentally and shifting it to the level of text activities" in the course of

communication (Psihologiya obshcheniya, 2015). Deliberate and targeted text activities are one of indicators of functional literacy (Vinogradova, Homyakova, & Rydze, 2018), which includes functional reading literacy (Alexandrova, Vasilevykh, Gosteva, Dobrotina, & Uskova, 2018; Kintsch, 2013), and an important condition for social communications, an indicator of informational culture (Ivanova & Osmolovskaya, 2014) and of a person's culture in general. The ability to perform a system of text actions is the foundation of communicative-cognitive activities not only in middle and high school, but also in vocational school and college, and in a person's further professional career. It means that it is necessary to have the skill of being able to implement one's communicative intents in an optimal manner and in the form of finished statements, which provides an opportunity for dynamic activities of a full-fledged participant of the communicative-cognitive process (Hillocks, 2008; Juzwik et al., 2006); the skill to perceive and interpret text information required for the adaptation to the ever-changing world, for continuous education, the importance of which can be especially distinctly recognized in today's information era.

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