

PNP 2021  
Personality in Norm and in Pathology 2021**FORMATION OF PROFESSIONALLY SIGNIFICANT QUALITIES  
UNDER THE GESTALT APPROACH**Anna Mochalkina (a)\*, Olga Andronnikova (b)  
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andronnikova\_69@mail.ru**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to develop and test a training programme for psychologists working with loss under the Gestalt Approach and to determine its effectiveness. The hypothesis is the assumption that a training programme specially developed for psychologists working with a loss under the Gestalt Approach will contribute to the level of development of professionally significant qualities (empathy, emotional warmth, reflection) that a psychologist who works with people who have experienced loss shall possess. The study (N = 104) was participated by students aged 19 to 22, including 50 girls and 54 boys. The subjects were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. Each group consisted of 52 people. The study used: Diagnostics of the level of empathic abilities, Questionnaire of reflexivity, Determination of the personality orientation. Methods of mathematical data processing –  $\phi^*$ , Fisher's criterion. Testing of the training programme for psychologists working with loss under the Gestalt Approach showed the effectiveness of the programme, which contributed to the level of development of professionally significant qualities as confirmed by mathematical and statistical methods of the study data processing. Further prospects of the study can be aimed at developing a comprehensive model for training specialists-psychologists to work with loss under Gestalt Approach.

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## **1. Introduction**

According to the forecasts of the World Health Organization, in 2020 mental health problems will come out on top of all diseases in the world, overtaking today's leaders like infectious and cardiovascular diseases. The information era characterized by global communications and the rapid exchange of information has led to a change in the requirements for an individual and his/her ability to live in various stressful life events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Fang, 2020), causing infodemic, which result in the experience of loss. The process of loss experience will depend on the personality of a person and in some cases, with insufficient resources, will require psychological, psychotherapeutic, or psychiatric support. In this regard, the problem of the lack of developed technologies for arrangement of high-quality training of psychologists who would provide psychological assistance and support for loss experience within the educational programmes becomes urgent

### **1.1. Approaches to understanding stress and trauma in psychological science**

The main research trends in the field of mental trauma (Levine & Frederick, 1997; Spirenkova & Achenteh, 2017) were considered, wherefrom it followed that mental trauma served as a source of intense psychological experiences in the case when there were insufficient resources for the mentality protection. The processes of mental trauma were analysed (Ilyin & Serdukova, 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), where we revealed that stress serves as a catalyst for adaptation processes in the body. In this study, the methods are based on the approach of Lindemann (2002), who defines loss as stress triggering the process of grieving.

### **1.2. The process of loss experience and the Gestalt Approach**

Grieving (Petrovskaya, 2016) consists in the gradual release of “Ego” from complete immersion in the memories of the lost significant and return to material reality. It was revealed that almost all the models of loss experience studied (Burina, 2016; Gross, 2018) contained such key phases as shock, denial, depression, and acceptance with no clear boundaries. Thus, we consider loss as an individual process, and to pass one a person has to live through several phases with the own needs each. Based on the needs of people experiencing loss, the professionally significant qualities of a psychologist (empathy, emotional warmth, positive attitude, self-awareness, and reflection) were identified, which made it possible to consistently accompany the client at every phase.

The phases of the loss experience are described within the framework of Gestalt Psychology, where the therapeutic work is based on the study of the phases of contact cycle, i.e. pre-contact, direct contact, full contact, post-contact. These phases correlate with the phases of the post-stress response to a traumatic event, such as shock, denial, anger, depression, and healing. The strategy of work is built depending on which phase of the contact cycle in the process of loss experience a person is. Effective passing the cycle means a complete process of loss experience and leads to new abilities to build relationships with reality and other people.

## 2. Problem Statement

Foreign psychological studies that are devoted to the process of loss experience (Gentry et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2016) are mostly aimed at studying the adaptive abilities of a person at the time of loss experience. As for Russian psychologists (Baeva, 2016; Burina, 2016; Karacheva & Magomed-Eminova, 2017), their works mainly address the issues of providing short-term psychological assistance in the event of various kinds of extreme situations. Despite the existing scientific research on this phenomenon, there is currently a lack of research in the field of providing long-term psychological assistance and accompanying the process of loss experience.

The foregoing determines the relevance of the historical and analytical study of the problem of the loss experience and the issues of training specialists to provide psychological assistance and support.

Thus, we have identified a number of contradictions that determine the relevance of this study:

- between the social process associated with an increase in situations that cause loss experience and an insufficient number of specialists capable of providing psychological assistance and support;
- between the need for psychologists who specialize in accompanying loss and the insufficient methodological elaboration of the concept of their training;
- between the currently existing concept of training specialists based on the Federal Educational Standard and the need for specialization within the framework of a professional standard.
- In this regard, the problem of the lack of developed technologies for arrangement of high-quality training of psychologists within the educational programmes who would provide psychological assistance and support for loss experience becomes urgent.

## 3. Research Questions

Based on the conducted theoretical analysis of the problems of loss experience and learning psychological counselling, we assume that a training programme specially developed for psychologists working with a loss under the Gestalt Approach will contribute to the level of development of professionally significant qualities (empathy, emotional warmth, reflection) that a psychologist who works with people who have experienced loss shall possess.

Thus, the main questions of the study were formed as related to the possibility of developing professionally significant qualities in the framework of vocational education and the effectiveness of the training programme for psychologists to work with loss under the Gestalt Approach.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to develop and test a training programme for psychologists working with loss under the Gestalt Approach and to determine its effectiveness.

Based on the theoretical analysis, the research hypothesis was formed, that was the assumption that a training programme specially developed for psychologists working with a loss under the Gestalt Approach would contribute to the level of development of professionally significant qualities (empathy,

emotional warmth, reflection) that a psychologist who worked with people experiencing loss should possess.

## 5. Research Methods

To solve the tasks, the following methods were used: Diagnostics of the level of empathic abilities (Ilyin, 2015), Questionnaire of reflexivity (Karpov, 2003), Determination of the personality orientation (Karelin, 2007). Methods of mathematical data processing –  $\varphi^*$ , Fisher's criterion.

### 5.1. A study plan

Based on the selected questions of the study, a study plan was developed, and a study sample was determined, which consisted of 104 students who were enrolled in the second-third year for a bachelor's degree in 44.03.02 "Psychological and pedagogical education", at the age of 19 to 22 years, including 50 girls and 54 boys. The subjects were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. Each group consisted of 52 people. The study procedure was carried out on the principle of voluntariness, and confidentiality of the information received.

### 5.2. The empirical study included three stages:

At the first stage, we analysed the personal qualities of the subjects with the diagnostic techniques we used in the control and experimental groups.

The second stage of the scientific research was to study the effectiveness of professional training of students-psychologists to work with loss, where a training programme "Peculiarities of psychological counselling when working with loss under the Gestalt Approach" was developed and tested for the development of professionally significant qualities in future psychologists of the Institute for Northern Studies of Yugra State University, the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education. The training was intended for 96 hours and took place from September 2018 to May 2019. Only subjects from the experimental group participated in the developing stage of the experimental research.

Upon completion of programme, the student shall:

- develop a general understanding of the process of counselling when dealing with loss under the Gestalt Approach;
- master in practice the skills and abilities of work at all stages of psychological counselling when working with loss under the Gestalt Approach;
- develop own unique style of psychological counselling when dealing with loss under the Gestalt Approach;
- develop professionally significant qualities for psychological counselling when working with loss under the Gestalt Approach.

The learning process shall include feedback on actions at each stage of psychological counselling when dealing with loss under the Gestalt Approach.

The programme consists of several parts. The first part reveals special features, goals, and objectives of the programme; the second part presents the content of the programme; the third part contains the rules for choosing students who can participate in the programme developed according to certain parameters; the fourth part reveals methods of obtaining feedback from participants of the programme; the fifth part is to assess the degree of effectiveness of the learning process built according to the programme.

The programme provides that the learning process is implemented within the framework of professional activity, not limited to the theoretical or practical aspect, but is a combination of them, which allows to effectively work with loss under the Gestalt Approach. Consequently, the process of preparing psychologists to work with loss under the Gestalt Approach is aimed at expanding practical experience and working out their own psychotraumas, which is facilitated by working with clients already at the stage of training, intensive practical activity and undergoing individual therapy.

In order to increase the development level of professionally significant qualities, students used not only conventional, but also interactive methods and forms of education. The conventional methods and forms include lectures and practical exercises, independent activity, and exercise. Among the interactive methods and forms of education that demonstrate high efficiency, one can single out the analysis of problem situations, business and role-playing educational games, discussion sessions, trainings, and group work. The efficiency of the use of interactive methods and forms of education is explained, first of all, by their focus on interaction, communication, and joint activities.

The third step was to determine the effectiveness of the programme.

## 6. Findings

The study took place in four stages in 2016-2020. The study was participated by 104 students enrolled in the second-third year for a bachelor's degree in 44.03.02 "Psychological and pedagogical education". The subjects were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups with 52 people each. The groups were not differed by criteria such as "gender" and "age".

We compared the development level of empathic abilities, reflexivity, and orientation of the personality in the experimental and control groups using the  $\phi^*$ , Fisher criterion. The results of the automatic calculation are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the development level of empathic abilities, reflexivity and orientation of the personality in the experimental and control groups using the  $\phi^*$ , Fisher criterion

Item	Value of $\phi^*$ emp
Development level of empathic abilities	0.817
Development level of reflexivity	0.945
Self-orientation	1.005
Business orientation	0.398
Communication orientation	0.49

A primary comparison was performed, which made it possible to state that there was no difference in the development of professionally significant qualities between the control and experimental samples.

Only subjects from the experimental group participated in the developing stage of the experimental research. The training programme “Peculiarities of psychological counselling when working with loss under the Gestalt Approach” was developed and tested for the development of professionally significant qualities in future psychologists of the Institute for Northern Studies of Yugra State University, the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education. The training was intended for 96 hours and took place from September 2018 to May 2019.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the training programme for psychologists to work with loss and a control study of the development level of professionally significant personality traits of students-psychologists were carried out. Comparative results of the study conducted in the experimental and control groups in terms of the completeness of professionally significant qualities of psychologists are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Comparison of the development level of empathic abilities, reflexivity, and orientation of the personality in the experimental and control groups using the  $\phi^*$ , Fisher criterion (control diagnostics)

Item	Value of $\phi^*$ emp
Development level of empathic abilities	4.621
Development level of reflexivity	3.792
Self-orientation	2.702
Business orientation	3.233
Communication orientation	5.13

Based on the results of the comparative analysis, we concluded that there were significant differences in the level of development of empathic abilities, reflexivity and personality orientation in the control and experimental groups. Testing and implementation of the training programme for psychologists to work with loss under the Gestalt Approach contributed to the development of professionally significant qualities.

## 7. Conclusion

In accordance with the results obtained, it could be argued that the objective of the study was achieved, and the hypothesis was confirmed. Having the set tasks of the study solved allows us to generalize the theoretical and methodological premises and empirical data obtained in the course of the development and testing of the training program for psychologists working with loss under the Gestalt Approach.

The living of loss under the Gestalt Approach has a four-phase structure: shock (pre-contact), grief (contact), emotional reaction, and assimilation of the past experience. Analysis of the needs of people experiencing loss at each phase has revealed the need for such professionally significant qualities as empathy, emotional warmth, and reflection.

For the formation of professionally significant qualities, a programme was developed for training students-psychologists to work with loss under the Gestalt Approach as an outcome of the study. Based on the idea of four-aspect training of psychologists, the developed programme provides that the learning process is implemented within the framework of professional activity, not limited to the theoretical or practical aspect, but is a combination of them, which allows to effectively work with loss under the Gestalt Approach. The process of training psychologists is aimed at expanding practical experience and working out their own psychotraumas, group therapy, and also includes components of supervision, practical activities, which begin already within the framework of the professional training.

The developed programme is aimed at developing professionally significant qualities in the field of psychological counselling when working with loss under the Gestalt Approach; the relationship of the psychologist with himself/herself, both in the role of the client and in the role of the psychologist, that is, the working out of internal processes, the awareness of the level of own competencies; and building communications with others. All of the above aspects shall be equally well developed in order for a professional to fully realize himself/herself and demonstrate a high level of efficiency.

Testing of the training programme for psychologists working with loss under the Gestalt Approach showed the effectiveness of the programme, which contributed to the level of development of professionally significant qualities as confirmed by mathematical and statistical methods of the study data processing.

Further prospects of the study can be aimed at developing a comprehensive model for training specialists-psychologists to work with loss under Gestalt Approach.

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