

Balint Technology in Pedagogy: Innovations or Transfer of Psychological Experience



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Abstract: *The article considers individual problems in the field of vocational education and personnel training of specialists in education, possibilities of using innovative technologies in educational institutions of higher education, aimed at achieving the goals of education at a relevant level, as well as contributing to professional integration and psychological support of both students of vocational educational institutions of the pedagogical profile, and teaching staff.*

Keywords : *national competitiveness, vocational education, innovative technologies, professional burnout, Balint groups, Balint pedagogical technologies.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important components of the national competitiveness of contemporary Russia is higher education and field-specific training [1]. There are a number of serious problems in vocational education, whose solution is currently quite relevant. The most important issues include the improvement of vocational education management, increase of the availability and quality of vocational education, diversification of educational activities, integration into the world educational space, as well as training and retraining of professional personnel [2].

In the context of adaptation to market relations and stiff competition in the field of education, universities face the task of training specialists, whose qualification and quality would satisfy the needs of employers in the labor market. However, research results show that the market is often unable to foresee what kind of specialists it will need even in the short term [3]. It became obvious that the traditional system of humanitarian education in modern socio-economic conditions did not sufficiently ensure the implementation of the social order in the field of professional training, and did not fully meet the needs of the individual in obtaining the

required education [4]. Besides, not all institutions and components of modern education equally take into account the requirements and interests of modern society and the state [5]-[7]. University graduates have the necessary completeness of knowledge, but not always successfully apply them in practice to the required extent. Most students have poorly developed ideas about the future prospects of their work. Their interest in the taught subjects is reduced, they doubt about the correctness of their choice, and lack the motivation for pedagogical work that results in a negative image of the profession [8]. Professional activity of the future specialist in the modern world assumes professional mobility, creative self-actualization, professional communication skills, ability to apply the latest technologies and to take responsibility for the solution of problems [9]. Modern society needs educators, who can not only recognize problems but also effectively resolve them [10], [11]. All this suggests a new approach to the professional training of students, the refusal to reduce this process only to the assimilation of knowledge and skills, which necessitates the formation of students' professional qualities that ensure the successful performance of specific functions related to the future profession [12]. A university graduate of the 21st century, along with quality training, must be the cultural actor, the bearer of high morals and social activity [13]-[15]. Today, training of students in pedagogical majors requires a special approach. First of all, it is necessary to form in future teachers positive attitude towards the pedagogical profession that involves raising the prestige and authority of the teacher, increasing the quality of training of educators, and creating conditions for the development of teacher identity. This approach should allow revealing new sides in human relations, associated with people's choice of their vital interests and landmarks, as well as contributes to the process of socialization. In modern socio-cultural conditions, the teacher is the main core in the development of education. Teacher's main social role is to form a personality, to give the student the foundations of human culture, to introduce him into life, and to adopt him socially [16]. The teacher must be a carrier of culture, able to assess the human consequences of certain changes in the humanities from the standpoint of professional culture. The aim of the modernization of teacher education is to train teaching staff in accordance with the professional standard of the teacher and the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Education.

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Attempts to reform teacher education have been repeatedly made by the professional community, especially in terms of modernization of pedagogical practice: new approaches and organizational forms have been proposed to conduct reforms in teacher education. All of them were aimed at narrowing the existing gap between the theory and practice in teacher education. However, the results obtained during the project, in general, do not yet resolve the main contradiction: almost all researchers continue to point to the lack of proper quality of training of future teachers, the existing gap between theory and practice, the need to ensure practice-oriented nature of education throughout the duration of the educational program (bachelor's and master's courses) [17]. Today, one of the tasks facing higher vocational education and training is a comprehensive solution to the problem of subsequent employment of university graduates. Many pedagogical universities face this problem, i.e. graduates are not employed according to their professions for a number of objective and subjective factors that ultimately devalues the university in which the vocational education was received. This concerns also the higher education itself, as it was not in-demand despite the fact that the state is experiencing shortages of teachers, and spends large amounts of funds from the state budget for vocational education of youth [18]. So, for example, only a small part of graduates of pedagogical universities in the Republic of Dagestan get a job in their specialty [19]. At that, the effectiveness of professional organizations at the present stage is largely determined by the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market, as well as the results of their employment after graduation. Indicators of graduates' employment and the success of their careers are increasingly used as indicators reflecting the quality of higher vocational education and serve the basis of a number of Russian and foreign university rankings [20]. In order to solve individual problems and pressing issues, to overcome difficulties in the modernization of vocational teacher education, as well as to support and assist graduates in their employment and further implementation of professional activities in their specialty, it is necessary to make significant adjustments in the educational process as well as in the system of vocational training in general.

This study is devoted to one of the solution options to the identified problems.

II. METHODS

A. General description

In the early 90s of the last century, the so-called Balint groups became widespread in medical practice. For Russia, this phenomenon is relatively new and little studied. However, in recent years, Balint groups in Russia are attracting more and more attention and heightening the interest of researchers and practitioners. Balint group was firstly created by Michael Balint, a Hungarian-British psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist.

In 1949, Balint conducted the first discussion seminars with physicians about the psychological problems of general medical practice, containing both training and research components. These meetings served the basis for emergence of the concept of Balint groups.

Balint groups are temporary associations of doctors, psychologists, social workers, or students trained in these specialties. The group work consists of discussion of individual cases from the practice of the group members [21]. The Balint group is a closed community. Communication takes place once a week for two to three hours. In order to achieve effective results, the work of the group should be carried out over a period of two to three years.

The aim of the Balint groups is to identify and adjust 'blind spots' in the interaction of physicians with patients, to help in finding compromises, as well as psychologically support participants. The object of discussion, in this case, is not the treatment process and not the patient himself, but the actions of the physician, not so much his attitude to the patient, to the treatment process itself, but the complexity and difficulties associated with this process. The tasks set by the Balint group are, first of all, awareness and finding ways to control their own feelings and emotions during their professional activities, the formation, and development of interpersonal relationships, increasing competence in interpersonal professional communication. The object of regard of the Balint group is psychological protection, feelings, emotions, communication activities; while the subject of the analysis is the discussion of real cases from the professional practice of the Balint community participants, which caused them some difficulties and troubles. These aspects usually cause unpleasant associations and recollections, which Balint community works with. The work of Balint groups is based on the following inviolable rules: respect for the opinion of any member of the group, lack of assessment and criticism, confidentiality, termination of the discussion on demand of the leader, who is selected from members of the group, or invited specifically for this purpose. The group leader is responsible for complying with the established rules. His job is to create a relaxed and comfortable psychological atmosphere in the group. As a result of the work of the Balint group, the emotional state of the participants improves, they become aware of their own problems in work, decrease anxiety, and feel satisfied with their professional activities and personal growth.

B. Algorithm

Classes in the classical Balint group take place in several stages. In Russia and abroad, the authors of the present work have published studies devoted to nature, principles of creation and functioning, methods and technology of training in classical Balint groups [22], [23]. As has been already noted, initially Balint groups were created in medicine. However, taking into account their successful experience in medicine, such groups began to appear in other areas, such as psychology, psychiatry, and jurisprudence. Their application was accepted in other areas of man-to-man activity. Nevertheless, when using Balint technologies in each of these areas, the main principle of forming a Balint group is the voluntary association of participants, who are ready to revise stereotypes in their work, the desire for self-improvement, concernment in collective mutual assistance.

The Balint group, created in the professional community, is primarily aimed at improving the personal competence of the participants. This can be both an educational institution of higher education and educational organizations of other types, in which it is also necessary to carry out work to maintain physical and psychological health of both students and educators to prevent the professional burnout. Participation in such community group results in the partial resolution of individual problems associated with professional activity, the search for compromises in difficult situations,

psychological support, and the creation of more comfortable and optimal conditions of pedagogical work.

One of the types of mutual psychological assistance in the group may be supervision. It refers to the implementation of a process which is performed by a more knowledgeable, more authoritative observer, who understands what is happening, sees the whole process of communication in all its multifaceted nature and strives to provide assistance. The work is aimed at the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities that contribute to the improvement of the professional activity of a specialist. Similarly to the Balint groups, the work is led by a trained specialist-supervisor. The supervisor oversees the process of conducting classes and then produces analysis and discussion of the information received. Supervision is not a way of monitoring the professional activities of participants but is training through counseling. It can be carried out in individual and group forms. Supervision can be effectively used in the course of training and advanced training of specialists in various activities [24]. Thus, in recent years, Balint groups were established in various fields of activities (pedagogy, psychology, and jurisprudence). Along with them, other innovative forms of interaction of participants appear in the field of training, retraining, and advanced training of specialists.

III. RESULTS

One of the most important components of high-quality professional training of future teachers is teaching internship for students, which is of great importance in the comprehensive training. Teaching internship is understood as a type of educational activity in which students apply the theoretical knowledge, acquired during the mastering of the educational program, specifically in a real situation and real-time mode in order to acquire and consolidate professional skills and abilities [25]. Currently, in the Russian Federation there are two regulations related to the organization of teaching internship of students: those, who master the basic vocational educational programs of secondary vocational education [26], and those mastering the basic vocational educational programs of higher education [25]. These documents establish requirements for the content of the teaching internship program, as well as define the powers of the internship supervisor, take into account issues related to the payment of travel expenses, and other financial issues. However, they do not address the issues of carrying out comprehensive work during the teaching internship, as well as after completion of internship by students, aimed at identifying and analyzing cases which are difficult, troubling, and nonstandard to students, which can potentially have

adverse impact on the subsequent employment of graduates in their specialty. Creation of Balint groups on the basis of pedagogical institute, as it seems to the authors, allows partially coping with the solution to the designated problem.

Students of pedagogical universities, for the first time going to the teaching internship at school, often face the problems associated with the communication with pupils, such as difficulty in the application of learned pedagogical methods and techniques. They experience self-doubt, lack of confidence in the sufficiency and completeness of their knowledge, and in some cases they experience the fear of the class, and even panic. The student not only does not cope with the task but also irrevocably loses the desire to engage in his chosen profession.

It is necessary to note that Balint group does not set a goal to find the only right solution. During the classes, one of the participants tells his problematic case. According to the rules of the group, he should do it only from memory, without resorting to records. The student should share his thoughts, emotions, and feelings that characterize the situation presented for a panel discussion. Then the situation should be analyzed by the group members. In this case, the role of the leader should be taken by the teacher (methodologist, supervisor of the internship).

IV. DISCUSSION

According to the authors, the following algorithm of Balint group activities in education can be effective:

1. Presentation by each of the students of his troubling case in pedagogical practice;
2. Selection of a specific case by group members together with the group leader to analyze by the group members;
3. The detailed story of the student, followed by questions from the rest of the participants and the leader of the group;
4. Proposal of possible ways of behavior in the analyzed situation from each of the Balint group participants;
5. Assessment of expediency, as well as performance forecasts for each of the options offered by participants;
6. Self-assessment by the student speaker of the impressions and results stemmed from the discussion.

From the above, it follows that the Balint technology in pedagogical activity can include six described stages.

In authors' opinion, this technology can be used not only in the course of training students but also in the work of young professionals, as well as experienced teachers, who may more than once face difficulties in training and education of the younger generation.

This will be a new format for teachers, where they will be able to present their problem to be solved and help colleagues with their vision of solving existing problems, as well as to share their experiences. It is assumed that the conduct of the group activity among teaching staff will be independent, i.e. without a coach. The group should have no more than 20% of participants with less working experience.

It should be borne in mind that, in fact, Balint method is a real technology, and if one changes something in the sequence of stages or steps over, then this will be something different, with a result different than is assumed by the classical Balint method.

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It is also obvious that blind and thoughtless copying when dealing with this technology, is unacceptable.

Teaching and education are a very specific area, and pedagogical problems differ from those experienced by physicians in their relationships with patients. However, it is at least dangerous to act frivolously, when applying Balint technology: group and individual dynamics can easily discredit the idea and create a new conflict field, rather than solve the set tasks.

It should be noted that even after the transfer and consolidation of the self-study technologies by the group members themselves, the presence of a supervisor (psychologist or methodologist) is necessarily required to monitor the correctness of the group discussion and provide professional assistance.

It should be noted that in the period of adaptation of Balint pedagogical technology in corporate training, certain difficulties or limitations may appear, such as:

- the level of trust in the professional group (selection of the group contingent);
- availability of quality supervision, i.e. group and individual dynamics (loss of discussion focus will necessarily emerge in one way or another);
- problems in interpersonal understanding among group members, etc.

Exploring the capabilities and experience of Balint group, it can be assumed that it gives the following opportunities to participants: creating an environment for more detailed and in-depth analysis of the educational activities; sparking interest in future teachers to work with troubled pupils; providing psychological support needed in the course of teacher education; increasing the future teacher's professional self-esteem; preventing and reducing adverse emotions associated with the assessment by a student of his activities.

The purpose of Balint technology application in the education is not only the efforts to eliminate difficulties in the activities of the future teacher but also to prevent the professional burnout syndrome of already working teachers to avoid the deterioration of education quality.

V. CONCLUSION

The main objectives of contemporary education are to provide high-quality training for specialists.

Higher education is undergoing changes, becoming the most important value among young people.

It is the education system that has huge impact on the project of life of contemporary students, since this or that educational track can open the way to achieve the set goals associated with obtaining a job in the chosen specialty.

Current day dictates the demand for highly qualified personnel. That is why obtaining appropriate education is the most important component for the younger generation.

The essence of the conceptual requirements for professional competence is reduced to the expansion of knowledge, skills, and competencies needed directly to increase labor productivity, as well as in life in general.

It is obvious that an important element contributing to the improvement of the quality of training is the use of modern innovative technologies to provide psychological support of students that is particularly relevant in pedagogical university. One of these methods is the creation and work of

Balint groups.

The Balint group is an effective method to solve troubled pedagogical tasks and communicative problems.

Based on the conducted study of the students' problems at pedagogical universities, the conclusion can be drawn about the existence of many difficulties, blind spots, problems, troubles, and failures that students experience in the practical pedagogical activity, and which have adverse impact on their future professional life.

The gradual implementation of Balint group experience in the field of vocational pedagogical training can be considered as being substantially justified. In earlier works, the authors have proposed a detailed algorithm for the activities of Balint groups in the pedagogical university as well as an attempt was made to define the concept of Balint pedagogical technology [22].

The Balint pedagogical technology is understood by the authors as the methodology of conducting classes for students of pedagogical universities and teaching staff of various educational organizations, based on the principles and technologies of classical Balint groups.

Based on already accumulated best practices in application of Balint group method in medicine, psychiatry, psychology, jurisprudence, and other fields related to the man-to-man interaction, one can assume that the work of the Balint group will have a beneficial effect on the training of future teachers, enhance their self-esteem, self-determination in the profession, as well as strengthen faith in one's strength, in the choice of profession, while for already employed teachers it can be effective means to prevent the syndrome of professional burnout.

At that, the creation of Balint groups in pedagogy cannot be just a simple copy of what already exists and is successfully used in medicine. These should be communities which use the basic principles and methods of classical Balint groups but taking into account the specifics of pedagogical relations.

In this context, it seems justified to develop more accurate, comprehensive, scientifically-grounded definition of Balint Pedagogical Technology followed by its introduction into scientific circulation, to use innovative technologies of psychological and pedagogical support of the educational process at all stages of the educational program, including the optimization of the theoretical knowledge obtaining process, organization of psychological support when passing teaching internship, and creating safe health-preserving educational environment. Despite the fact that the work of Balint groups is based on live communication, the use of modern technologies, application of peer-to-peer networks, for example, such as videoconferencing, Skype, and systems providing telepresence, allows participating people from different localities, who do not have the opportunity to meet for personal communication in the group, as well as people with disabilities. The application of such technologies in small towns and populated localities, where sometimes it is difficult to create a full-fledged Balint group due to the small population, will be especially important. This is another challenge to be studied in the future.

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