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LEARNING ACTIVITY AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract. *The psychological-pedagogical phenomenon of students' learning activity is examined in the article. The goal of the article is to analyze scientific literature concerning the problem of learning as a kind of activity. The definitions of "activity" and "learning" are clarified. An overview of these categories was made. By generalizing the existing terms of "learning activity", the most appropriate definition of it for our research was found.*

Keywords: *activity, activity theory, learning, learning activity.*

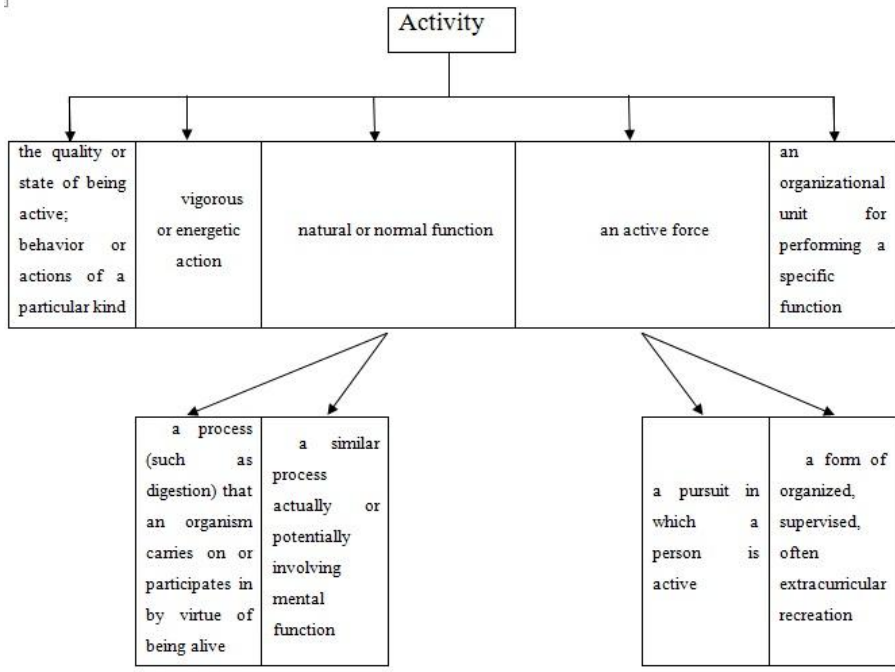
The category of "activity" is fundamental to a wide range of humanities (philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, pedagogy), since it allows to understand the phenomena of social life in their functional roles and genesis. In our research we stick to the topic of students' learning activity in the process of professional training. That is why the phenomenon of learning activity is the key point which should be defined.

The aim of this article is to analyze pedagogical, psychological, and philosophical literature concerning the problem of learning as a kind of activity.

The first task is to make an overview of such categories as "activity" and "learning". The second task is to find the best suitable definition of "learning activity" which reflects the essence of our research.

Activity is the subject of philosophical, sociological, historical, pedagogical, and psychological research. From a philosophical point of view, activity means a specific form of socio-historical life of people, consisting in their purposeful transformation of the surrounding reality. The subject of activity can be collective (group) or individual. Carrying out activities, the subject not only changes the world around us, but also it changes itself, its opportunities and experience.

Merriam-Webster dictionary [7] gives many definitions of the term "activity".



The most appropriate for our research definition is that activity is a process which actually or potentially involves mental function. Also activity is explained here as an educational procedure designed to stimulate learning by firsthand experience.

In any activity of the subject there are such components as a goal, a product (realized goal), means, process and conditions. To carry out individual activity, a person needs to display all of these components. It is important for building a program of activity and monitoring the process of its implementation, as well as evaluating the result (product). Reflection of essential components of activity and the organization of purposeful activity of the subject are possible due to the development of the psyche, consciousness, and language. By mastering the language, an individual becomes a member of society, is included in social life, subordinates his/her behavior to social tasks (socializes) and acquires the ability to arbitrarily manage his/her own behavior.

For the implementation of collective life in society, the means and forms of organization (planning, regulation, control) that have cultural-historical nature are created. These include ethical and legal norms, morals, traditions, customs, religion, etc. Social activity is diverse. It is accepted to allocate kinds of activity according to its substantive content: labor (professional), learning (education), game, communication (interpersonal).

Activity theory (approach) in the humanities can explain the phenomena of individual and social life, anticipate future changes, develop projects of rational management of social processes [9, p. 135]. This theory begins with the notion of activity. An activity here is seen as a system of human "doing" whereby a subject works on an object in order to obtain a desired outcome. In order to do this, the subject employs tools, which may be external (e.g. an axe, a computer) or internal (e.g. a plan). Activity theory considers an entire work/activity system (including teams, organizations, etc.) beyond just one actor or user. It accounts for history of the person, environment, role of the artifact, culture, motivations, and complexity of real life activity. One of the strengths of activity theory is that it bridges the gap between the individual subject and the social reality — it studies both through the mediating activity. The unit of analysis in activity theory is the concept of object-oriented, collective and culturally mediated human activity, or activity system. This system includes the object (or objective), subject, mediating artifacts (signs and tools), rules, community and division of labor. The motive for the activity in activity theory is created through the tensions and contradictions within the elements of the system [15].

Psychological science determines activity as a specific type of human behavior, one of the main features of which is that the content of activity is determined not only by the need that caused it, but also that the activity is guided by the goal. The purpose is what the activity is targeted for, for the sake of what it is going on. The activity of the individual is inextricably linked with thinking and will, relies on them, and is impossible without cognitive and volitional processes. It comes from the need for the subject. Activity, which is "personally colored", is carried out constructively, in a certain direction, with a certain orientation [13, pp. 266-268].

By the definition of traditional psychology "activity" is a specific form of social existence of people, which consists in the purposeful transformation of natural and social activity. Convertible and purposeful nature of activity allows its subject to go beyond any situation, pasting the activity into a broad context of social and historical existence. All this emphasizes openness and versatility of activity. It needs to be understood from the standpoint of historical and cultural development as a form of creativity. The person's construction or creation of his/her activity is an indispensable condition for the formation of his/her personality [13].

Unlike the laws of nature, the laws of society are manifested only through human activity, which creates new forms and properties of reality, transforms some of the source material into a product. Any activity carried out by its subject includes purpose, means, process of conversion itself and its result.

The purpose of the activity arises in a person as an image of the expected result of creation. Converting and setting-the-goal nature of activity allows its

subject to go beyond the specific situation, fitting it into the wider context of socio-historical existence.

The concept of activity from ancient times was developed mainly in the idealistic philosophy, especially deeply in the German classical philosophy. I. Kant regarded the subject of activity not as the one who contemplates reality, but as the one who creates forms of the objective world. To the rank of the general basis of culture activity was first brought up by J. Fichte. The most advanced theory of activity was built by G. Hegel, who described its general scheme, analyzed the dialectic of its structure in details (including determination of goals and means between each others), made a number of deep comments as for social and historical stipulation of activity and its forms.

In the materialist dialectic, the notion of activity was the initial abstraction, the specification of which makes it possible to create a general theory of the development of social existence and its separate spheres. The primary form of activity is the production of material tools, through which people create objects that satisfy their vital needs.

The material and spiritual activity of people and their corresponding types of production are the basis for the emergence and development of social and individual consciousness, the individuality of a separately taken person. Consciousness is a function of the ideal side of activity, which manifests itself in the ability of individuals to produce real objects, based on the word or model as products of socio-historical development.

Along with the dialectical-materialistic understanding of activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries other ideas which in general concerned such an essential component of activity as action were developed. J. Dewey, in line with the philosophy of pragmatism, created the theory of actions, considering the latter as concepts of instrumental content. M. Weber, having analyzed various types of individual social actions, has emphasized in them the special significance of value systems and orientation. J. Piaget, on a logical-mathematical and psychological basis, developed an expanded concept of actions and operational intelligence of a person.

Along with it in Western philosophy there were tendencies to reject considering activity as the essence of human existence and the general basis of culture. In place of the definition of the goals, “impulse” and “experience” were put. In the middle of the 20th century, the influence of the theories of activity began to weaken in the humanities. But in the 70’s and 80’s the interest to polydisciplinary theoretical and experimental development of problems of activity revived in different countries [3, pp. 264-265].

Scientist O. Asmolov notes that the personality is formed and manifested in the activity. Activity determines the person, but the person chooses the activity that determines his/her development [1].

Thanks to the works of L. Vygotsky, the basis for the formation of the psychological theory of activity was prepared. He created the cultural-historical theory of higher mental functions, made a great contribution to the development of a historical approach to the development of the human psyche, studied the problems of consciousness, thinking and language, created the idea of a crucial role of activity in the child's mental development. The works of L. Vygotsky allowed many scholars to approach the origins of activity.

In the pedagogical dictionary [6, p. 37] the following definition is given: activity is a form of psychic activity of the individual, aimed at the knowledge acquirement and the transformation of the world and the person himself/herself. Activity consists of smaller units – actions, each of which has its own specific goal or task. Activity includes purpose, motive, ways, conditions, and result.

By the definition of S. Vishnyakova, activity is a form of active attitude of a person to the world around him/her; a motivated set of naturally related behavioral acts and consistently implemented actions aimed at fulfilling certain tasks, at achieving certain socially significant goals [14].

Classification of kinds of activity is complicated by the fact that in the world humanities this term has broad meaning. In the English language the word “activity” means any kind of practical or cognitive activity of a person. However, not all manifestations of vital activity of a person can be attributed to activity. Real activity is always associated with the transformation of reality, and the German terms “Tatigkeit” and “Handlung” correspond to it to a greater extent.

Different branches of scientific knowledge have different grounds for classifying activity. Sociologists allocate labor, political, artistic, scientific and other kinds of activity. In pedagogy such kinds as game, educational and work activity are distinguished. In psychology, the activity correlates with many mental processes (sensory, mnemonic, mental and other kinds of activity). The main reason for any classification is the philosophical and historical-sociological approach to activity. It allows to consider labor activity in all historical forms of its development as a basis for the classification, and also to derive from this basis all the diversity of other kinds of activity that historically arise in the social life of people. Historical sociology is the scientific discipline that opens, studies, and even projects the formation of all interconnected types and forms of activity. It is intended to explain the place and role of each activity in ensuring the integral social life of people. Other disciplines which study activity rely on the results of historical-sociological research; in its turn, the materials of these disciplines are used for specifying historical-sociological conceptions of activity.

A person in his/her multifaceted life carries out various concrete kinds of activity, which differ primarily in their substantive content. Each kind of activity has a definite content of needs, motives, tasks, means, actions, and

operations. One of the main problems of the research is to reveal the substantive content of each of its kinds; only after that one or another socio-psychological formation that is observed in a person can be defined as a specific type of his/her activity [3, pp. 264-265].

Such types of activity as game, learning and labor are determined by generalization and differentiation of the main types of activity that are inherent to all people. These varieties correspond to the types of social activity, in which each person is involved in the process of individual development. Game is a type of activity that involves emotional mastering of a person's social experience and emotional satisfaction. Labor is a socially determined type of activity; human activity to meet their own needs and benefits through the use of means of labor [13, pp. 286-289].

The definition of learning as a kind of activity for us is the most important. Learning is a type of practical or theoretical activity, which by its nature is the cognitive process of person's assimilation of social experience [13, p. 288]. The peculiarity of learning activity is that it serves as a mean of psychological development of an individual.

By the definition of "Ukrainian Pedagogical Dictionary" [4, pp. 223-224] learning is a purposeful process of transferring and assimilating knowledge, skills, and methods of person's cognitive activity. Learning is a two-sided process: student's activity – studying and teacher's activity – teaching. Learning plays a central role in mental development and preparation of students for work. The content of learning is determined by the level of development of sciences and social experience of mankind, methods and forms of learning – by age and individual differences of students, needs of society and school to convey to their pupils a maximum of knowledge and skills with minimal costs and in historically short terms. The following elements are distinguished in the structure of learning process:

- statement of problem and comprehension of cognitive tasks;
- perception of objects and phenomena, formation of concepts, observation, imagination and thinking of students;
- consolidation and systematization of knowledge, formation of skills and abilities;
- application of knowledge, skills and abilities;
- analysis of students' achievements, control and evaluation of their knowledge, achieved level of mental development.

There are also other definitions of the term "learning", which are very important:

- the act or experience of one that learns;
- knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study;
- modification of a behavioral tendency by experience [8];

- measurable and relatively permanent change in behavior through experience, instruction, or study. Learning itself cannot be measured, but its results can be [2];
- learning is the act of acquiring new or modifying and reinforcing existing knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences which may lead to a potential change in synthesizing information, depth of the knowledge, attitude or behavior relative to the type and range of experience. The ability to learn is possessed by humans, animals, plants and some machines [16].

In psychology and education a common definition of learning is a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one's knowledge, skills, values, and world views [5, 10].

The main results of learning, which begins in early childhood and lasts throughout the life of a person, both in the form of organized learning or self-learning, is education (general, polytechnic, professional, etc.), development and upbringing of a person.

According to S. Rubinstein [11, pp. 495-496] learning is a kind of derivative form of activity in which the purpose is shifted or moved in comparison with the activity for which it serves as a preparation. What is a background, mean, or a way of the latter, for learning it serves as a purpose. And both shifts and changes of motives are inevitably linked with this bias of a goal. In fact, however, not everything that a person learns, he/she acquires as a result of learning in this particular sense of the word – learning or learning process as a special activity aimed at mastering certain knowledge and skills, as its direct purpose. A learning process in which learning becomes a result of an activity, without being a goal, can be very effective. There are, therefore, two types of learning or, more precisely, two modes of learning and two types of activity, in a result of which a person acquires new knowledge and skills. One of them is specifically aimed at mastering these knowledge and skills, as its direct goal. Another leads to mastering of these knowledge and skills, carrying out other goals. Learning in the latter case is not an independent activity, but a process which is carried out as a component and the result of another activity. Learning or bringing to the final results is usually carried out in both ways, in one or another relation. Consequently, we can conclude that, according to S. Rubinstein's definition, learning will be the most effective only if it is included in another process and will not be considered as a separate activity. Also, learning should be the result of another activity, that is, after completing a certain activity, a person has to learn something. Under such conditions, learning will have persuasive results.

According to O. Sergeenkova [12] the content of learning activity is determined by the curricula developed for each year of study, taking into account the age-specific features of the child's psyche and its physical

capabilities. Throughout the whole process of learning, the student not only acquires knowledge and skills, but also develops active, creative, independent thinking, improves memory and attention, expands the worldview. The educative nature of learning can be seen in the process of learning by the formation of a personality, by laying a number of valuable features such as purposefulness, persistence, a sense of collectivism and mutual assistance.

In the article we made an overview of such categories as “activity” and “learning”. We generalized the mentioned-above terms and found that the most appropriate definition for our research of “learning activity” will be the following: learning activity is a specific type of practical or theoretical activity, the process of which involves comprehensive development of the person, cooperation between a person who studies and a person who teaches, professional training, and is a basis for the whole educational process, without which transferring of knowledge from one generation to the other is impossible. Further steps of our research will be devoted to the development of the term “interactive learning activity” and its classification.

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