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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL THINKING IN RUSSIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the notion of critical thinking which was borrowed from the world experience and accepted by Russian education system. As a result of new ambitious goals set in Russian education it has become necessary to use advanced foreign experience, in particular, the technology of critical thinking closely connected with reflection which finds its application in all stages of educational process including higher education. In order to create the preconditions in the science of our country for implementing the given concept, the literature on psychology and pedagogy was analyzed and the notions of thinking criticalness and mind criticalness were stated. In psychological and pedagogical research studies by Russian scientists a conceptual framework to implement new principles for fostering critical thinking was developed by the end of the XX century. The conducted analysis revealed that Russian education had all preconditions to enter a new stage of development which met the social demands of modern society in the context of globalization. The notion of criticalness transformed into the notion of critical thinking at the turn of the century. The article considers the stages of reflection and principles of fostering learner's critical thinking during the educational process. The articles of foreign scholars which describe the given technology in application to education on the whole and foreign language teaching in particular were studied while doing research; the own research study of using the elements of critical thinking technology when preparing for State Final Examination on foreign languages was conducted.

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Keywords: Critical thinking, criticalness, reflection, education, self-assessment.



1. Introduction

Having come into sociological use at the end of 1990s, the notion of globalization as a historical process of transforming the world into a uniform system has its reflection in the modern education system of the Russian Federation. Global changes occurring in the world extend economical, socio-cultural, informational interaction of Russia with other countries. The scientific and technical breakthroughs in the field of information and communication technologies, the appearance of the global network Internet contributed to the “blurring” of geographical and national boundaries as well as to development of transboundary education.

Transboundary education is aimed at solving the following tasks: to provide education accessibility; to universalize knowledge; to establish high international quality standards; to increase innovativeness and competitiveness of the national educational systems; to extend and promote international cooperation in the sphere of education and science (Philipov, Krasnova, & Grinshkun, 2008). Global changes in education are observed in all countries all over the world. Countries with a centralized education system, among which is Russia, tend to decentralization, whereas countries with a decentralized education system (Great Britain, USA) strengthen a federal management unit of education system, introduce standard state curricula and programs (Myasnikov, Naydenova, & Tagunova, 2009). The education paradigm is changing from strong collectivist (USA, Japan, Russia) and individualistic (Great Britain) approaches to the balanced integration of collectivist and individualistic personal values. There is an active process of refusing traditional approaches in favour of adapting new knowledge and experience focusing not on developing a particular ability – intellectual, moral, creative, etc. but on their integration. The process of reformation in Russian education system aims at developing critical, reflective and creative thinking – cognitive processes which are necessary to form a combination of abilities intended to provide the development of a modern personality that is able to self-realization in the condition of the worldwide globalisation of the society..

2. Problem Statement

Automation and computerization of nearly all spheres of life optimize these spheres making their internal processes simpler and more comfortable for humans. On the other hand, global growth of technology and, as a consequence, acceleration in the rates of social development necessitates an ability to adapt to the changing world (Volkov, 2016), to prepare people to accommodate to the rapidly changing conditions, especially, to prepare people who are able to consciously take the situations of risk, challenge, choice; to analyse, reconsider and synthesize information; to make informed decisions, to do forecasts and provide judgements; to apply the gained experience to different area of knowledge; to suggest fresh approaches and ways of problem-solving. These and many other abilities accumulate in themselves critical thinking which is in close interaction with reflection. Both notions are complex and multidimensional and they have a lot of interpretations in different spheres of application but, as a rule, they act as integral parts of the same process. Thus, critical thinking can be considered as a metacognitive process which by means of reflection increases chances to finish the argument logically or to find the right solution to the problem (Dwyer, Hogan, & Stewart, 2014). In addition, Wagner (2019) writes about applying 10 critical-thinking standards for self-reflection when teaching public speaking to students. It has been proved that reflection

provides students with a method to get to know about their experience, preferences in learning and teaches them to judge with a critical mind everything they have studied (Frydrychova, 2014).

The essential role of critical thinking and reflection through a focus on adopting learner-centered approach (McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008), promoting learner autonomy (Bisse, 2017), applying the principle of long-life education is researched and discussed extensively in the world educational space.

Having made a serious commitment to integrating into the world academic space, Russian academia tries to follow its priority developments by actively adopting international best practices in the field of educational organization and content.

3. Research Questions

The notions of critical thinking and reflection in the educational process are widely discussed in Russian educational environment; numerous scientific and practical research studies are devoted to these types of thinking. Within the frames of the given research an attempt to reveal the preconditions of implementing the concepts of critical and reflective thinking in Russian education has been made. Thus, we have to find out the degree of development of the conceptual framework in psychological and psychology and pedagogical studies of native scientists for implementing the above-mentioned principles as well as the factors contributing to creating a seamless continuum to a new format of education. Moreover, we have to make a case for the significance of the studied notions in modern Russian educational environment.

4. Purpose of the Study

The given paper is aimed at analyzing the degree of development of the notions in national science of the XX century which preceded the implementation of the critical and reflective thinking in scientific use as well as at revealing the preconditions of implementing the given principles successfully under present-day conditions of education development in Russia.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods are theoretical – the analysis of scientific papers devoted to critical thinking, reflection; empirical – the comparison of notion contents and description of observation results. Methods of synchronous and diachronous information analysis have been used in the research.

6. Findings

Native literature review showed that Russia had all the conditions for implementing the concept of critical thinking successfully since native psychology and pedagogy used such notions as thinking criticalness and mind criticalness related directly to the modern theory of critical thinking. The peculiarity of native science in connection with the development of these problems is that the problem of criticalness was mainly developed in the context of psychological theory of thinking where criticalness was understood by scholars in different ways. For instance, Brushlinsky and Tikhomirov (1989) and others considered

criticalness as the process of feedback which was a universal way of self-regulation (Brushlinsky & Volovikova, 1983). In pathopsychology criticalness is considered as a performance of regulating function of thinking which consists in the ability to act reasonably, to check and correct the actions in accordance with objective conditions. Brushlinsky and Volovikova (1983) specify that the process of criticalness was carried out by immediate and direct comparison of intermediate, current results of any action, the progress of solving problems with their final overall result. Under condition of critical interpreting of contradictions or initiate misfortune, according to the scientists, more reliable criteria of self-assessment of every thought and self-control are worked out.

Sometimes criticalness is considered in connection with the problem of social adaptation. Sufficient criticalness, in essence, shows social maturity of a personality, especially in situations when a person must make a choice based on morality and one of the considerable personality deviations is impairment of human behavior criticalness. Studying criticalness as one of the main personality qualities scholars draw special attention to criticalness as a personality need. In this respect, criticalness can reveal itself as a current mental state, a volitional human quality and a character trait.

The notion of criticalness passed successfully from pathopsychology into pedagogical psychology where criticalness is spoken in the context of criticalness formation, criticalness demonstration, criticalness development as the most important quality of actor and behavior, which provides the personality with ability to conscious regulation, control and assessment of their own and somebody else's actions. Criticalness ensures the ability to initiate learning activity to a great extent and allows thinking productively, assessing objectively and selecting the required information from the viewpoint of truth, validity, reasonability; to stand up for own standpoint; to find appropriate ways of solving problems (Kopylova, 2001).

The quality of mind (criticalness) like any other quality, according to the representatives of pedagogical psychology, requires for its development to state special problems, to use effective methods for the purpose of involving students in the process of assessing the results of learning activity (their own and their classmates). Self-control which takes place both in the process of decision-making (analysis of the applied method and correlation with its condition) and after getting the result (self-check in different forms) is closely connected with their self-assessment, level of thinking development. Here reflection serves as one of the essential features of critical thinking.

In pedagogy criticalness is defined as a process of problem-solving which includes the discussion of the process, job performance and its assessment. This assessment can be expressed in fault detection or in detection of something positive, valuable in things and phenomena or in verification of the fact, idea being discussed. Moreover, mind criticalness is connected with independence and mental flexibility. This quality of mind means the ability to consider the decision as a possible action, to understand its relativity.

Taking into account everything mentioned above one can conclude that in national pedagogy and psychology of the XX century criticalness was studied as a quality of thinking as well as one of the most important personality traits. Most researchers simultaneously defined the notion of criticalness both as a quality of thinking and as a personality trait which influences the behavior of mental processes. Studying criticalness as a quality of thinking native scholars emphasized different abilities and skills paying more attention to evaluation and self-regulation functions. By the end of the XX century the notion of mind

criticalness gained its comprehensive theoretical understanding that made scientific community ready to implement the concept of critical thinking into Russian education system.

The analysis of the terms “criticalness” and “critical thinking” reveals their conceptual similarity in terms of goal-setting – making a balanced judgement about the problem, comprehensive and overall assessment of the situation on the one hand and seeing and explaining the ways of solving the problem on the other hand.

Nowadays the technology of developing critical thinking is used at all stages of Russian education. In Russian institutes of higher education students were first introduced to the specialized course of study “Critical thinking” in 1998 at Lomonosov Moscow state university. Within the course it was postulated that critical thinking method is vital for future specialists in situations of decision-making since transition political and economic processes of modern Russia require professionals who orient in constantly changing information flow, show analytical abilities and skills to take rational decisions regardless of external pressure (Sorina, 2003). At present, critical thinking is an integral part of education in universities since students should understand the obtained information from the viewpoint of possibility to apply it in future profession. This happens in line with world trends as foreign researchers point out that critical thinking method teaches independence, fosters motivation, promotes academic performance (Stupple, Maratos, Elander, Hunt, & Aubeeluck, 2017) as well as develops the most significant expert skills from the very beginning of studying at institution of higher education (Hyytinen, Toom, & Postareff, 2018).

In national pedagogy Zair-Bek and Mushtavinskaya (2004) made a valuable contribution to the theory of developing critical thinking. In 2004 their book “Developing critical thinking during the lesson” was published where methods applied to develop children’s abilities to think, to be critical of information, to take decisions and make conclusions by themselves were first described in national methodology. In the given paper communicative situations between the teacher and the learner were created where teachers play different roles: a teacher with autocratic teaching style or a facilitator assisting to orient in information flow. The authors point out that when fostering learner’s critical thinking the teacher provides some freedom to the learner who gains experience and acquires new knowledge by trial and error. The teacher should not only broaden knowledge and develop skills but also provide an opportunity for such personality functions as inventiveness, reflection, being-in-the-world, self-fashioning, responsibility and personality autonomy (Zair-Bek & Mushtavinskaya, 2004). When using this approach the student has a right for mistake that is fundamentally different from orthodox teaching methods.

To foster critical thinking it is necessary to interpret constantly what is going on. It passes through three stages: challenge, content understanding, and reflection. Challenge is the stage where students analyze knowledge they have, set the goal and define what new knowledge they would like to gain. At the stage of understanding students are involved in the process of searching new information. At the stage of reflection new information is transformed into own knowledge.

Reflection is defined as a mental process focused on analysis, understanding, self-perception – self-exploration, self-analysis; as an important mechanism of the inner world of human individuality in the process of developing spiritual and professional skills (Shadrikov, 2010). In the Soviet era reflection was basically the subject matter of psychology. The fundamentals of reflection were introduced in works by L.S. Vygotsky and developed in works by Rubinshtein, Semenov, and Stepanov (1983) and others; they

considered reflection as an explanatory principle of mental functioning or as a categorial means to confirm theoretical concepts of mental development.

Since the Federal State Educational Standard (FSES) was implemented into educational process, reflection has become an obligatory part of the lesson. In FSES particular stress is laid on activity reflection since in traditional pedagogy learners were not required to comprehend what was happening and there was no place for reflective kinds of activity. Consolidation or synthesis of the obtained knowledge was applied instead. The teacher offered a set of ready-made tools to organise a process of knowledge acquisition at each stage. Today's educational process has shifted the roles of the teacher and the learner. The teacher plays a role of an organizer of the learning process and the learner is a central figure. The stage of reflection is an obligatory condition to create a developing environment at the lesson and it is closely connected with developing universal learning skills.

As a collaborative activity, reflection allows improving educational process being focused on the personality of every learner. Reflection helps the learner not only to comprehend the ground covered but also to form a logic chain, to systematize the experience gained, to compare own achievements with achievements of other learners. Not all learners can assess their actions critically and take responsibility for them. The objective of reflection is to teach how to control their own activity as a source of motive and ability to learn.

For senior high school students reflection is considered as a necessary condition for self-education and self-improvement, as an individual human ability, as a basis of their conscious behavior. The learner is active if he understands the aim of the studies, their necessity, if each of his action is conscious and understandable. Therefore, reflection is an obligatory stage and condition for creating a developing environment at the lesson as well as it allows looking at the educational process "from within". Reflection can be implemented in different ways: the elements of reflection at some stages of the lesson; reflection at the end of each lesson, the course module; gradual change to constant inner reflection.

At the present stage of education development and Federal State Educational Standard implementation, reflection of learners should be developed purposefully. Reflection is just the mechanism which shifts the problem from being outer in relation to the human into the inner one. As soon as the learner becomes a problem bearer, he starts finding its solution. The teacher's role turns not into recommendation distribution but problematization or optimization of ways to solve the problem.

Thus, reflection and assessment activity at the lesson allows the learner to fix new content studied at the lesson; to assess his own activity at the lesson; to diagnose difficulties as a direction of future learning activity. It will allow the teacher to analyze and assess the learners' activity, his own activity as well as to define new approaches in organizing effective cooperation in class in order to involve learners in vigorous activity (Bogdanova, & Kaverina, 2018), and specifically to develop for students a methodology of self-study training for a unified state exam in foreign languages (Goncharova, & Kalinina, 2019).

7. Conclusion

The conducted analysis revealed that Russian education had all the preconditions to enter a new stage of development which met the social demands of modern society in the context of globalization. The implementation of new education requirements and criteria favored actualization, modernization and

activation of the notions which were in the focus of Soviet educators and psychologists, to a greater extent in a theorized format. Based on the aim of modern education which is to develop learner's potential, to acquire sound knowledge and skills with the possibility to transfer them into practice, the notion of criticalness transformed into the notion of critical thinking. At the same time thinking changed its direction from reflection of curricular material content to reflection of activity. Such factors as successfully applying self-learning in Russia for many years, implementing individual educational routes, orienting to system-activity approach established favorable conditions for adapting global experience successfully.

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