

**EdCW 2020****International Scientific and Practical Conference Education in a Changing World: Global Challenges and National Priorities****PREPARING STUDENTS FOR TEACHING AND EDUCATION:  
THE EXISTENTIAL-LOGOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACH**

Irina Ulyanova (a)\*, Maria Erofeeva (b), Lena Kulikova (c)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Kikot Moscow University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Moscow, Russia, iva2958@mail.ru

(b) Kikot Moscow University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Moscow, Russia,  
erofeeva-ma72@yandex.ru

(c) Saint Petersburg Suvorov Military School, St. Petersburg, Russia, kuliklen@mail.ru

**Abstract**

The article is focused on the issues of professional training of students for teaching and education in post-industrial society: worldview uncertainty, unpreparedness for personal and professional development. Though the competence-based approach is prevalent in the system of higher pedagogical education, it is deficient. The necessity of its integration with approaches that can contribute to the harmonious socialization of the personality of the future teacher and educator is considered of significant *importance*. One of these approaches is the existential-logo therapeutic approach. Its essence is revealed in two interdependent aspects: a) facilitating the development of the existential sphere of the future teacher's personality; b) helping students' master the teaching profession as a meaningful purpose in life through striving for self-transcendence and self-realization in the work of love. In the educational process, the effectiveness of this approach can be achieved through implementation of methods and techniques of logo therapy within the framework of the pedagogy of life-meaning orientations.

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## 1. Introduction

The preparation of students for professional pedagogical activities in the higher education system is largely determined by historical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and philosophical factors. All this is reflected in the classification of educational programs, the content of subjects, methods of organizing the educational process, specific features of relations between students and teachers, and other aspects of education. Educational philosophy is of importance as it determines the methodological basis of the educational and humanitarian discourse of the professional training of students, the development of the future teacher's personality, and fostering their worldview. In the era of post-industrialism (Polyakova, 2016) in developed and developing countries, it is very difficult to shape students' worldview in the educational process (Golovanova et al., 2020; Tikhonova, 2020), because in postmodern society, the ultraliberal ideas are actively competing with those of humanism, and anthropologism. Humanistic and anthropocentric ideas are reflected in such philosophical trends as existentialism and personalism (Shevchuk, 2009). In line with these trends, a humanist teacher aims at moral education of students, developing their empathy, responsiveness, responsibility, creativity, sociability, and stress resistance. On the contrary, postindustrial society is interested in the consumer personality, the hedonist and nihilist as opposed to education, work, and progress (Barnett & Madison, 2012).

In industrial and post-industrial society, as Frankl (2010) stated, the meaning of life is the search for the meaning of life and a possibility of losing it. He pointed out the strengthening of collective neurosis, and the existential vacuum of personality. The existential vacuum is a state of inner emptiness experienced by a person who has lost all the goals in their life and does not see the meaning of their existence. The essence of collective neuroses, the way Frankl (2010) sees it, is expressed in the following:

1. adopting an attitude to life as something ephemeral, which means a refusal from long-term planning, from setting a certain goal that would organize people's life;
2. a fatalistic attitude towards life, when it is impossible to make plans for the future, because external circumstances are stronger than a person is; a person is unable to control anything;
3. a conformist attitude to life, when a person feels like an insignificant creature among others;
4. fanaticism as a denial of other people's personalities while striving to be superior to everyone.

Under the described conditions, *existential concerns occur* among children and adolescents, when exogenous risks make them think that everyday life is a burden. Although it might seem paradoxical, in the relatively prosperous (from a material point of view) developed countries (Finland, Japan, Russia, and others) the level of suicides among minors is rather high (Längle, 2019; Surgucheva, 2018). Taking a positive attitude to life and realizing its meaningfulness is difficult in the study environment, which is largely characterized by ostracism (Mlika et al., 2017), anxiety (Chiu et al., 2020), digital transformation (Serditova & Belotserkovsky, 2020), and others. Apparently, the absolutization of the competence-based approach (Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020) in the process of preparing students for teaching and education becomes unproductive.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the present settings in the Russian system of pedagogical education, there is a contradiction between the demand of society and students for the realization of existential-logotherapeutic support of personality in the educational process and the scientific theory and practice of adopting the existential-logotherapeutic approach to learning environment. It is necessary to emphasize that in such conditions, yesterday's school graduates – today's first-year students in most cases are in dire need of correction of their personalities due to the insufficient development of personality spheres such as motivational, existential, and moral ones. Nowadays, students' life aspirations are limited to particular social and selfish motives (Sevostyanov & Gainanova, 2019; Sizganova et al., 2020). It is obvious that it is difficult for them to make a moral choice, to productively resolve internal and external conflicts.

Taking into consideration the Soviet practices based on understanding pedagogical activity as a vocation, an important humanitarian mission, the researchers can gain insight into the essence of the existential component of the professional preparation of students for teaching and education. Slaktionin and Mischenko (1997) pointed out the role of the integral pedagogical process in the training of educators, and the need to understand the contradictions of modern school. The National Educational Psychological Service has made substantial contribution to harmonization of child-adult relations (Dubrovina, 2004).

In the context of Russian pedagogical traditions, Zeyer (2013) points out that in modern settings, the process of professional development should be provided by “transformation of the psychology of vocational education into a branch of applied psychology, an academic discipline and a specialization” (p. 19). The pedagogical aspect of life meaning problematic was deeply studied by Chudnovsky (2006). The scientist emphasized that the age factor is of importance: childhood should not be excluded from the problematic; he stated the issues of understanding the meaning of life, and its moral potential (Chudnovsky, 2006).

Popova (2018) has continued developing the ideas of Chudnovsky. On the basis of the Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, she is implementing the youth educational project “The meaning of life and destiny: How to build your own future?” The participants of the project are students mastering higher education programs, including pedagogical ones, and high school students. The project participants assimilate meaningful problems through having meetings with interesting people, designing thematic artworks – “My home”, “The colors of my personality”, “The value of my life”, etc., completing training tasks, and existential reflection (Popova, 2018).

Baykova et al. (2019) emphasize the need for a modern teacher to care about the social health of modern children and adolescents, which is associated with the problems of migration and inclusion. Grebenyuk and Grebenyuk (2019) introduced the concept of “existential sphere” into pedagogy that gave an impulse to synthesize the ideas of philosophy, existential psychology, adjusting them to suit the educational content. Shershneva (2001) pointed out that pedagogical activity could become a factor in identity formation and the development of both the existential sphere of a person, and an educational institution. The study of the existential sphere as a value-goal of modern education is based on a synthesis

of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical ideas about the meaning of human existence, a person's readiness to solve difficult dilemmas, situations of moral choice, and actualization of humanistic values.

Rozhkov (2002) and his adherents developed and successfully tested the concept of existential pedagogy. Within the scope of this approach, it is necessary for teachers to master the methods of social and pedagogical support of students, effective communication, solving prognostic and organizational tasks (each educational situation is an emotionally significant event in a person's life, which in many ways becomes a real milestone).

### **3. Research Questions**

The questions the study is to answer are as follows.

- What is the level of readiness of pre-service teachers for professional activity within the scope of the existential-logotherapeutic approach?
- How do the individual and transcendental aspects of personal support correlate in the educational quasi-professional activity of pre-service teachers?
- What pedagogical methods, and speech therapy techniques effectively contribute to the professional development of pre-service teachers?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of the study is to introduce the basic concepts and essentials of the existential-logotherapeutic approach into the system of professional training of students – future teachers, their personal and professional development.

### **5. Research Methods**

The participants of the research study, having been conducted for 10 years, were full-time students of a number of Moscow universities receiving pedagogical, socio-pedagogical, psychological, and special (defectological) education (bachelor degree and specialist degree programs). The total number of respondents is 400 people; the average age is 18.5 years.

The results of the study were obtained by using the following methods and techniques: theoretical analysis of scientific literature; expert assessment of pedagogical conditions that ensure the personal and professional development of students; the life-purpose orientations test (LPOT). The LPOTest was designed by Leontyev (2000) as an adapted version of the "Purpose in Life" test (PIL) by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) based on the theory of striving for meaning and logotherapy by Frankl. The scientist pursued the goal of empirically validating representations of the PIL. He focused on purposes in life; life productivity; life process; locus of control (self or life); general life meaning.

The test-questionnaire “Existence Scale” was used to reveal a person’s existential fulfillment (self-distancing, self-transcendence, freedom and responsibility), the degree of “personal orientation” (openness to oneself, to the world). Rokeach’s (1973) methodology “Value orientations” was used to assess the value-semantic sphere of personality.

The projective techniques “Line of my life”, “My life path” were used to reveal the emotional state of a person, features of their temperament and character, ideas about their own life and attitudes towards it; personal problems; the ways they solve them; the definition of goals and ways to achieve them. Essays and collages “I am in a future profession”, a map of personal and quasi-professional self-assessment were to complement to the projective techniques.

## 6. Findings

The study have showed that the existential-logotherapeutic approach to preparing students for pedagogical activity in the conditions of post-industrial society becomes more and more urgent. It is associated with a possibility of noetic preservation of the personality of both teachers and their students, as well as the socio-cultural improvement of modern society.

The diagnostics of first-year students, having begun to study in the educational program, showed that only a small part of them got acquainted themselves with the specifics of the future profession. Only 6% of the students referred to scientific literature; 2% of the students studied in classes with a psychological and pedagogical bias; 14% of the students were involved in comprehensive vocational guidance organized by either schools or city social and psychological services, or district social and psychological centers. Such low indicators of the quasi-professional orientation of yesterday’s graduates show that, in general, modern young people have a poor understanding of the *problems* associated with *professional choice*, goal setting, the meaning of life, and creating their life path.

There were formed two groups of first-year students – the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG). They both studied the disciplines “General fundamentals of Pedagogy” and “Pedagogy” in the first semester. The study of the students’ life-meaning orientations (the LPO test) showed that at the beginning of the academic year the general indicator “general life meaning” deviated from the norm. 72% of the respondents showed a tendency to underestimate their scores, the results being in the range of “medium- and low level”. The greatest difficulties for students were caused by the questions of goal setting (Subscale 1) and taking responsibility (Subscale 5). Subscale 1 scores were low. This is inherent in people who live in the present or the past, and find it difficult to project the future. Subscale 5 scores were also low. This is inherent in people who find it difficult to make independent decisions and be responsible for them.

A special module was included in the learning process for the students of the experimental group to help them master the disciplines within the scope of the existential-logotherapeutic approach to vocational pedagogical training. By the end of the first year of study, the EG students’ indicators on all the subscales, including the subscale “general life meaning”, had stabilized, and began to correspond to the psychological norm. They were in the range of “medium- or high level”, which had a positive effect on student achievement: the average academic score was 4.5 out of 5. The respondents in the control

group were not able to solve their meaningful problems; student achievement also turned out to be lower compared with the experimental group (average score – 4.2).

According to the results of the Rokeach test, at the beginning of the experiment, it was revealed that among the students' terminal values predominated the following: love; health; a happy family life. But there was a total disregard for socially significant values: happiness of others. Among the instrumental values, independence, honesty, and cheerfulness turned out to be a priority, while responsibility, self-control, open-mindedness were neglected. By the end of the academic year, the latter passed into the category of significant ones in the experimental group.

Teaching within the scope of the existential-logotherapeutic approach, as practice has shown, should be prolonged; it is most effective if it is an element of the pedagogical system of a department/faculty/university during the entire period of training. It is productive if it is carried out by a teacher within the framework of basic academic disciplines or by a creative team of a department (possibly within one or two semesters).

Let us present a brief description of the content of this module, which conventionally represents a horizontal-vertical construct. Its methodological essence is hierarchical. At the philosophical level, this is a synthesis of the ideas of dialectical materialism, secular humanism, and positive existentialism. At the general scientific level, it is realization of a systematic approach to organizing the educational process through the pedagogical system of a department. The effectiveness of the existential-logotherapeutic approach in the system of general and higher education has been proved by the pedagogical system of life-meaning orientations based on the theoretical and technological basis of the pedagogy of life-meaning orientations (Ulyanova, 2017). Its consistency is also revealed in the multiplicity of interrelated elements of the educational process including not only purely pedagogical aspects, but also psychological, cultural, sociological, and historical ones.

At the scientific level, an integrative approach to the educational process is implemented, which includes existential-logotherapeutic, personality-oriented, cultural, environmental, activity-based, and competence-based ones. The organizational potential of the existential-logotherapeutic approach is realized based on the following principles. The process of professional training of a student is personalized by actualization of personal quasi-pedagogical experience. It includes analysis of students' feelings, memories, dreams; professional and personal reflection; optimism; search. This actualizes setting professional and personal goals, defining prospects, and their correction; gaining insight into their mission in the profession as the meaning of life; self-transcendence as a person-creator (What do I give to the world, children?); search for moral examples in pedagogical activity and their study; reflection; readiness to overcome difficulties, if necessary seek professional help, etc. In the educational process, the teacher expediently applies these principles by implementing various educational topics, methods, forms of education and training, which necessarily include the following activities: analytical, organizational, creative, reflective, communicative ones, and the development of empathy (Ulyanova, 2017). Additionally, for personal and professional development, it is important to orient students towards acquaintance with the works of representatives of humanistic pedagogy, existentialism, logotherapy, to reveal not only the essence of the scientific views of leading scientists, but that of their personal stories (Frankl, 2015). In this case, students' educational activities become significant through systematically

designing information stands, posters, thus giving a stimulating, developing potential for the educational system.

The technological level of the specified methodological vertical is represented by a set of methods, techniques, and means that can stimulate the development of the existential sphere of students' and teachers' personalities as well as enhance teachers' leading qualities as a humanist, necessary professional skills, and abilities. In particular, the methodological basis for a specific academic discipline (for example, "General Fundamentals of Pedagogy", "Introduction to the Profession", etc.) includes the diagnostic techniques, which have a powerful developmental, and corrective potential. Along with this, teachers need to build a support system for students to deal with collective neuroses of modern young people and implement a logotherapeutic "arsenal" for their prevention and correction.

So, based on the three foundational building blocks discovered by Frankl (creative values (creating something), experiential values (*experiencing something*), attitudinal values (attitude to others)), appropriate methods are implemented in the educational process. On the one hand, these methods are traditional (for example, the method of projects, the method of positive and negative examples, etc.); on the other hand, they are specific, implemented in accordance with phenomenological, existential, and logotherapeutic principles. For example, students can be encouraged to personalize their answers in the classroom by using appropriate phrases and affirmations. "Working on a pedagogical project, I have realized that I want to create a non-standard environment for supporting children's dreams (plans)"; "Studying the works of Sukhomlinsky – a teacher-humanist, I have grown to believe that I will strive to be like him" can be good examples of personalized statements. Essays (e.g., "I am a humanist") serve the same aim. Within the framework of the existential-logotherapeutic approach, methods of actualizing the personal experience of students – case studies, discussions, debates based on watching feature films or literary works presenting pedagogical concerns, modeling pedagogical situations – acquire special significance.

The logotherapeutic techniques developed by Frankl effectively function in the educational process. These are logoanalysis, dereflection, and paradoxical intention. Logoanalysis is beneficial when through a person's consciousness, concretization of values, awakening imagination, and experiencing insight, their ideas of new possibilities, and a new meaning of life evolve (as a result, students' understanding of life and values enhances).

Dereflection helps a person switch from self-centeredness to meanings and values necessary for living a fulfilling life. As a result, an extremely important mechanism of reflection, which stimulates the development of students' self-awareness, is counterbalanced by dereflection (shifting away from excessive concentration on oneself).

Paradoxical intention means that a person does not isolate themselves from the situations and problems that disturb them, but becomes, in a way, their "master", changing their attitude towards situations where they might fail (through "right passivity", or "right activity"); humor is very significant in this case (Frankl, 2015). Along with this, in pedagogical practice, students learn to employ such methods of professional activity as Socratic dialogue: naive questions, *conditional* or hypothetical *statements* ("if"), metaphors, symbols, and parables; imaginative techniques: logodrama, and fantastic dialogue.

The logotherapeutic potential for pedagogy is also important from the point of view of strengthening the mental health of students. It is associated with the idea of a certain level of tension that arises between a person and objective meaning, localized in the external world; if such a meaning is not realized then frustration, a vacuum is felt. As a result, the importance of pedagogical control in the educational process becomes clear, when teachers set specific quasi-professional tasks for students, discuss the results of their solution, evaluate achievements, and give necessary recommendations.

## 7. Conclusion

Responding to the questions posed in the article, the authors can state the following. The professional preparation of students for teaching and education in post-industrial society needs to implement the existential-logotherapeutic approach. Based on the philosophical and methodological foundations, logotherapeutic techniques are of considerable importance for professional training as they are expediently supplemented by relevant pedagogical means helping students overcome the risks of an existential vacuum, and personal frustration, which is significant for both future teachers and their students.

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