АКТУАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ ВИЩОЇ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ

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A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH AS THE BASIS FOR TRAINING A PROSPECTIVE PROFESSIONAL

The article discusses the essence of a competency-based approach to professional training in higher education. The said approach manifests itself in a set of professional competencies, formed primarily by the educational content structuring and agent-oriented technologies.

The present-day society imposes particular requirements on graduates from institutions of higher education as prospective professionals. First and foremost, these requirements stipulate for the graduates' ability to foresee and follow their career paths making their own existentialist choices, be ready to demonstrate commitment and independence in setting and pursuing important goals, make learning a life-long process and strive for self-development. The above requirements are determined by the corresponding modifications in professional training of higher education institution graduates, including the competency-based approach thereto.

The competency-based approach is defined as a set of techniques, ways of influencing people or learning things. Researchers (A.I. Subetto et al.) describe this approach as a systemic concept of a person's educational accomplishment, which is in high demand today. Competency-based education, or a competency-based approach, is a complex of ideas, principles, methods and forms implemented to achieve the set goals/tasks aimed at a certain outcome.

The research and implementation of the competency-based approach in the Republic of Belarus is performed in the framework of the state education policy and specific features of the national education system. The said approach is being implemented through practical professional education, improved state education standards, and its application to various spheres of education (mainly, the competency-based training of prospective professionals).

The paradigm of educational goals and outcomes (which involves research) is designed with reference to the competency-based approach implementation. The said goals and outcomes manifest themselves through professional competencies and expertise. Requiring professional modification, the social and cultural environment puts forward the idea of a person's professional expertise and competencies as an integral part of the above.

Answering the "what for?" question, competencies comprise generalized knowledge, skills and experience (aggregate practical knowledge and skills). Expertise is a person's ability and willingness to act, the degree to which competencies are mastered. Professional competencies demonstrate generalized skills, knowledge and experience in a certain occupational area involved in solving various theoretical and practical tasks.

Educational process participants accomplish "personal self-determination and professional competencies" (N.S. Sakharova) through the competency-based approach as the primary objective of education. This enables them to perform their prospective professional duties taking into account the current social and cultural setting. A Belarusian researcher A.V. Makarov studies the factors contributing to the introduction of the competency-based approach in professional education: a) major changes in almost every profession, b) the growing importance of horizontal mobility during a person's career development, c) introduction of mass education as a notion, d) increased dynamism and aggravated uncertainty etc.

A prospective professional's training at the first stage of higher education aims at creating a 21st-century professional, possessing a set of work-related (professional) competencies, a

mature and adaptable personality, capable of finding their way through the complex reality of the modern world, mastering a creative approach to organisational and managerial decisions as well as a methodology for their implementation. Having graduated from an institution of higher education, a person must be competent in organisational and managerial as well as informational and analytical activities. The educational goals for the 21st century, set by Jacques Delors, correlate with the competency-based approach to professional training: learning to experience, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to live. Therefore, the following competencies are essential for those who graduate from institutions of higher education – special, communicative, and social. They are considered the most important precondition that helps a person to effectively adapt to the new life situation. The high level of the above competencies allows a person to hold leading positions in their social setting.

Professional expertise encompasses a wide range of competencies in various occupational areas, which allows to divide them into groups (clusters), as the final goal/outcome defined in competencies requires their detailed description. Professional competencies mastered by a prospective professional may be grouped as follows: knowledge (methodological, theoretical, specific and applied), procedural activity (projective, organisational, managerial, reflective and evaluative), and communicative (informational, interactive, perceptive).

The essence of professional competencies is as follows: the ability to analyse the accumulated knowledge and skills, using them in the course of performing a person's professional functions, ways and means of achieving the goals set (Yu.G. Tatur); the set requirements to the educational training of prospective professionals (A.V. Khutorskoy); a complex of professional knowledge and skills, as well as the ways to perform professional activity (E.F. Zeer).

Applied in professional education, a competency-based approach specifies its general goal orientation which manifests itself as follows: the educational goal is projected by reference to the social and public contract; the prospective professional's training is expected to result in professional competence groups, providing an integrative outcome as a whole. At present, there is a competency-based student training technology being developed and appraised, including: designing the educational content, working out job-related technologies; and creating an educational setting structure for an educational institution.

The educational content may be designed with reference to standards (national educational standard that serves as the base for newly created syllabi). Designing the educational content and its problematic area involves the following approach (proposed by S.N. Severin): social and cultural determination of the educational content; levels and sources of the educational content design; design principles; educational content concepts; standard educational content and its design above the applicable standard; heterogeneity (variety) of the educational content; the unity of content and procedure in an educational process; technological efficiency criteria; the local technology level of the educational process design (task-oriented, situation-oriented).

Let's consider the professional training technologies with reference to creating an educational setting, namely, an agent stimulating setting. Considering previous research on the matter, the proposed definition of an agent stimulating setting may be as follows: a setting that provides the right conditions for students to benefit from first-hand experience in various activities to shape and develop their personal qualities as active agents (initiative, independent thinking, independent action, creativity), thus securing maximum display of personal agency – the ability to consciously design their personal and professional development, modifying both themselves and the world around them. The activity in the said setting is stimulated by the agents (students) themselves, their needs, reasoning, attitudes and values.

Creating and developing an agent stimulating setting entails a strategy to increase the quality of higher education and involves the use of agent-oriented technologies. They can be specific and local, aim at creating an agent stimulating educational setting to let students make their own independent conscious choice of personal educational, career and life routes based on their needs and impelling motives. Application of the said technologies used to create an agent

stimulating setting modifies all the components of the educational process, which manifests itself in the active students' involvement in goal-setting, cognitive activity planning, choosing the means to achieve the desired goals, evaluation, and self-testing to assess their own personal and professional qualities.

Local agent-oriented technologies, applicable to nearly each and every class, are of great interest. Thus, the use of the goal setting technology places priority on the personal goal-setting process, helping the students formulate their own personal meanings and personal impelling motives for taking up cognitive activity, as well as gain the experience of conscious decision-making. Personal goal setting involves meaning making by choosing personal meanings for the classroom activity in a certain discipline (the "My expectations" technique). As the students develop their ability to set personal goals, they are offered to draft their own classroom activity meanings, bringing them to the next activity stage – namely, setting particular educational tasks for the class as well as the level of mastering the educational content. Gaining the experience of distinguishing between goal levels makes it possible to apply the "My opportunities" technique.

Local technologies include individual educational route design, involving both self-determination of students as to the personal meaning of their activity, and the choice of ways, means and stages in the course of pursuing their goals. This technology provides educational process participants with the right to choose the educational route difficulty level (basic, advanced of profound), for which the teacher has to work out tasks of various difficulty levels.

The present-day educational system makes use of a formative, or criteria-based, assessment technology based on the approach to the students' performance evaluation. The formative assessment technology enjoys wide appreciation abroad. It involves working out criteria and indicators to assess knowledge, skills, creative assignments, metadisciplinary and personal experience, as well as their conscious application in various classroom activities. Judging from the experience, if students know the evaluation factors and criteria in advance, they understand what they can do well (their advantages) and what needs improvement, thus enhancing their performance.

As to the use of specific technologies, we cannot but mention the project-based learning technology, which involves modelling educational and social activities. Another successful technology is the work trial technology, which involves initial introduction of students to professional activities at the early stages of higher education. Work trial encourages students to acquire knowledge provided for by the educational content and master their future profession.

Thus, taking into account the present-day social and cultural setting, the competency-based approach fundamentally changes the educational process, where the tasks and objectives are preconditioned by the final outcome, shaping and developing the work-related competencies of a prospective professional.

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INTERCULTURAL TOLERANCE AS A COMPONENT OF THE FUTURE SPECIALIST'S COMPETENCIES