Psychological knowledge in teacher’s professional activity

Conocimientos psicológicos en la actividad profesional del docente

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ABSTRACT:
Present study addresses the problem of a modern teacher’s abilities to use the psychological knowledge acquired in the university during the actual professional activity. We specifically focus on prospective teacher’s training in the university and his readiness to conduct personality-oriented education. Present work is based on psychological knowledge, and in perspective, teacher’s ability to use this knowledge in the educational process. Based on the method of self-evaluation, we conducted the study of certain aspects of theoretical and practical readiness of practicing teachers with different experience in pedagogic work to use the psychological knowledge in solving the didactic tasks. The main method of obtaining the results of the survey of teachers with work experience was a survey on the means of reflective thinking, aimed at teachers’ self-evaluation of their knowledge in psychology, practical readiness to use them, teacher’s attention to developing students’ personality qualities and the problems that a teacher experiences in practical activity. Analysis of the obtained results allowed validating the need in enhancing the attention to them in the process of students’ professional training in the university. To this end, we presented examples of the tasks, which were developed for students’ practical lessons and educational internships, in order to increase their

RESUMEN:
El presente estudio aborda el problema de las habilidades de un profesor moderno para utilizar los conocimientos psicológicos adquiridos en la Universidad durante la actividad profesional real. Nos centramos específicamente en la formación de futuros docentes en la Universidad y su disposición a llevar a cabo una educación orientada a la personalidad. El trabajo actual se basa en el conocimiento psicológico, y en perspectiva, la capacidad del profesor para utilizar este conocimiento en el proceso educativo. Basándonos en el método de autoevaluación, realizamos el estudio de ciertos aspectos de la preparación teórica y práctica de los docentes practicantes con diferentes experiencias en el trabajo pedagógico para utilizar los conocimientos psicológicos en la solución de las tareas didácticas. El principal método de obtención de los resultados de la encuesta de docentes con experiencia laboral fue un estudio sobre los medios de reflexión reflexivo, dirigido a la autoevaluación de los docentes sobre sus conocimientos en psicología, disposición práctica para utilizarlos, atención del profesor a desarrollar las cualidades de la personalidad de los estudiantes y los problemas que un profesor experimenta en la actividad práctica. El análisis de los resultados obtenidos permitió validar la necesidad de mejorar la atención en el proceso de formación profesional de los estudiantes en
1. Introduction

One of the most important aims of the higher school is the quality of training for students – prospective teachers, because this quality largely defines the success of their consecutive professional activity, and ultimately, the level of education and culture in the future generations.

Productive professional establishment of a modern teacher is related to the acquirement of various scientific knowledge that is stated in educational standards and educational programs. Knowledge of various fields of psychological sciences and their subsections has a certain role in these documents. One of those subsections is a multidisciplinary field – pedagogical psychology. According to B.G. Ananyev (1981 p. 14), pedagogical psychology is a borderline comprehensive field of knowledge that “…got a certain place between psychology and pedagogics, became a field of cooperative studying of the interactions between mentoring, education and development of the growing generations”.

I.A. Zimnyaya states (2000, p. 7) that “pedagogical psychology develops in the general context of scientific ideas about a person, which were stated in the main psychological trends (theories) that did and are affecting the pedagogical thought in each specific historical period. This is related to the fact that the educational process always acted as a natural research “ground” for psychological theories”.

Current “Pedagogical psychology” subject solves the following tasks: revealing the mechanisms and pattern of educational and mentoring effect on student’s intellectual and personality development; revealing the mechanisms and patterns of students’ mastering of the accumulated social and cultural experience; revealing the specifics of organizing and managing students’ educational activity and influence of these processes on their intellectual and personal development and educational and cognitive activity; studying psychological bases of teacher’s activity, his professional and personal qualities; establishing the mechanisms and patterns of developing education; defining the conditions of knowledge acquisition by students, etc.

Currently, a new educational paradigm is distributed in Russian educational system, namely, personality-oriented paradigm, in the context of which education is based on the assumption that the leading factor in the development of student’s personality is his needs, motives, aims, skills, activity and other individual psychological traits (Gorovaya and Petrova 2017; Zeer 1999; Zimnyaya 2000; Zinchenko 1994). This implies that, during teacher’s professional training in the university, the main attention should be focused on the development of his readiness to conducted the personality-oriented education (Gerushinkiy 1998; Serikov 1994; Reference vocabulary in pedagogical diagnostics, 1989; Zinchenko 1994). The center of gravity of such training is psychological knowledge (psychology of activity), as well as a person’s ability to use it in the educational process, which was repeatedly stated in the works of P.Ya. Galperin, V.V. Davydov, I.I. Ilyasov, L.B. Itelson, G.A. Kitaygorodskaya, V.A. Krutetskiy, V.S. Lazarev, N.S. Leytes, A.K. Markova, A.M. Matyushkin, M.I. Makhmutov, Yu.M. Orlov, A.V. Petrovskiy, V.V. Rubtsov, S.D. Smirnov, N.F. Talyzina, I.S. Yakimanskaya, and others.

However, analysis of the modern educational practice leads to the conclusion that many teachers, especially the ones at the beginning of their professional activity, do not have the necessary level of knowledge on the patterns of cognitive process organization, children’s age specifics, their individual psychological traits, etc. In other words, such specialists lack the...
necessary level of psychological culture, which includes both theoretical preparation in general and special psychological courses, and proficiency in practical abilities and skills that are necessary for the productive organization of the educational process with school students. Our longstanding experience in working with university students shows that the most problematic aspect for a teacher at the beginning of his professional journey is the design of the educational process, educational lessons and constructive communication with children on the basis of psychological patterns.

2. Methods and design of the study

In order to prevent the flaws and to optimize students’ preparation for effective use of psychological knowledge in the pedagogic activity, it is necessary to know the exact state of the educational practice. To this end, we employed an empirical study.

The aim of the study was to obtain empirical data: 1) on the actual state of psychological knowledge in teachers working in the general-education institutions; 2) on their readiness for practical use of the psychological knowledge in the educational activity; 3) on the main problems of using psychological knowledge in the practical pedagogic activity.

The study involved teachers with various work experience (under 3, under 10 and over 10 years) from several municipal general-education organizations on the territory of the Stavropol Territory, who participated in the centralized professional development course.

The main method of obtaining empirical data was a survey, which implied participants’ responses to certain questions of the researcher through reflective thinking (Fedorov, Kollegova and Mazaeva 2006; Kochetov 1996).

The questions were presented in written form and were accompanied with the options of responses. The respondent could choose the response he preferred. The first task implied only one response, while all other cases implied choosing several options. The block of tasks was solved by the participants successively. Moreover, we conceded the possibility that teachers’ self-esteem could be subjective to a certain extent. However, it was possible to reveal the general state of the problem in order to prepare recommendations for the prospective improvement of the organization of students’ educational activity and teachers’ work.

In order to obtain reliable results of the study, it was important to conduct both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data with consecutive definition of the strategy of working with students.

3. Results and discussion

Task 1. Which of the levels presented below corresponds with your knowledge in psychology:

1 – I possess psychological knowledge at the level of ideas;
2 – I possess psychological knowledge at the level of comprehension of the main questions of the content;
3 – I possess the whole integration of psychological knowledge;
4 – I possess psychological knowledge at the level of its use in specific pedagogic situations.

The respondents’ results on this task are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ responses (in %)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the data presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents (from 54,0% to 57,0%) evaluated their psychological knowledge only at the level of ideas. Furthermore, the largest group included the teachers with work experience under 3 years, i.e., those who graduated recently. In their responses, the lowest self-evaluation scores were given to the characteristics concerning the whole integration of psychological knowledge and its use in specific pedagogic situations (16,0% and 3,0%, respectively). Such data allow stating that pedagogic activity of the recent university graduates cannot provide positive educational results.

We explain the obtained results by the imperfection of the content of the educational standards that were introduced in the past years, concerning psychological training of a prospective teacher in a modern university, along with the lack of courses that are rather significant for the pedagogical work (Personality psychology, Psychology of development and pedagogical psychology), and limited amount of study time for mastering the content of psychological disciplines.

Moreover, such data point to the fact that pedagogical psychology as an educational subject in the university does not have the central place in the professional pedagogic training of a modern teacher. When the teachers of pedagogical and methodical subjects address the models of organization of students’ educational activity in school, they usually address them separately from psychological mechanisms of the cognitive process and learning activity.

Task 2. Evaluate your practical readiness to use psychological knowledge in the pedagogical activity upon the following characteristics:

1 – I am able to study a student’s personality on the basis of the psychological diagnostics methods;
2 – I am able to organize educational work on the basis of knowledge on the age specifics of school students;
3 – I am able to conduct individually-differentiated approach in education;
4 – I am able to solve pedagogical conflicts and improvise in extraordinary situations;
5 – I am able to conduct pedagogical reflection.

The respondents’ results on this task are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>With experience under 3 years</th>
<th>With experience under 10 years</th>
<th>With experience over 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge at the level of ideas</td>
<td>57,0</td>
<td>54,0</td>
<td>53,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge at the level of comprehension of the main questions of the content</td>
<td>24,0</td>
<td>21,0</td>
<td>19,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole integration of knowledge</td>
<td>16,0</td>
<td>17,0</td>
<td>19,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge at the level of its use in specific pedagogic situations.</td>
<td>3,0</td>
<td>8,0</td>
<td>8,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Teachers’ self-evaluation of practical readiness to use the psychological knowledge
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>With experience under 3 years</th>
<th>With experience under 10 years</th>
<th>With experience over 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to study a student’s personality on the basis of the psychological diagnostics methods</td>
<td>27,0</td>
<td>30,0</td>
<td>29,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to organize educational work on the basis of knowledge on the age specifics of school students</td>
<td>24,0</td>
<td>33,0</td>
<td>34,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to conduct individually-differentiated approach in education</td>
<td>16,0</td>
<td>37,0</td>
<td>42,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to solve pedagogical conflicts and improvise in extraordinary situations</td>
<td>14,0</td>
<td>40,0</td>
<td>53,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to conduct pedagogical reflection</td>
<td>23,0</td>
<td>44,0</td>
<td>57,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 2 show that, for the first characteristic – “I am able to study a student’s personality on the basis of the psychological diagnostics methods”, the difference in the responses of the teachers from all three groups is insignificant (only 2,0%).

For the second characteristic – “I am able to organize educational work on the basis of knowledge on the age specifics of school students” – the responses of teachers with work experience under and over 10 years do not differ significantly (33,0% and 34,0%, respectively). Furthermore, the responses of young teachers for this characteristic were only 24,0% of the overall number of choices.

The evaluation of the ability to conduct individually-differentiated approach in education and to solve pedagogical conflicts, especially in extraordinary situations, was even lower in teachers with less than 3 years of work experience (16,0% and 14,0%, respectively).

The choice of teachers with work experience under 10 years and over 10 years was significantly higher for these characteristics: within the range of 33,0% to 53,0%. Such results can be explained in different ways. Certainly, on the one hand, experience in professional pedagogical activity has a significant effect; on the other hand, these teachers enriched their psychological knowledge and abilities in the process of multiple courses in professional growth and special courses for the education workers.

**Task 3. Which personality qualities of students you especially notice in the process of teaching your subject:**

1 – development of knowledge;
2 – development of cognitive interest;
3 – development of practical abilities and skills;
4 – development of axiological orientations;
5 – development of research skills;
The respondents’ results on this task are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Teacher’s attention to the development of students’ personality qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ personality qualities</th>
<th>Teachers’ responses (in % from the overall number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With experience under 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of knowledge</td>
<td>64,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of cognitive interest</td>
<td>30,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of practical abilities and skills</td>
<td>46,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of axiological orientations</td>
<td>18,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of research skills</td>
<td>38,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of cognitive independence</td>
<td>33,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of culture of thinking</td>
<td>17,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results presented in Table 3 show that the most significant component of teaching, for all groups of teachers, is still the development of knowledge: this option was chosen by 64,0% of teachers with less than 3 years of work experience, 66,0% of teachers with less than 10 years of work experience and 69,0% of teachers with over 10 years of work experience. Moreover, the group of most experienced teachers (over 10 years of work experience) dominates in this case.

In our opinion, such results point to the fact that “knowledge-oriented” paradigm continues to dominate in the professional training of a prospective teacher. Therefore, it is possible to state that the questions of students’ development as a goal, pedagogic cooperation and activation of educational forms have not yet become central.

In this context, it is not surprising that the development of school students’ axiological orientations does not have a significant spot in teacher’s work (regardless of the work experience): in quantitative form, this choice comprised from 18,0% to 20% of responses.

Teachers’ responses concerning the development of school students’ cognitive interest toward the studied subject were almost equal between the groups (30,0%).

As far as axiological orientations and culture of thinking are concerned, they took a rather insignificant part of respondents’ choices.

In general, according to the results of teachers’ performance in the third task, their professional orientations have not yet undergone a significant transformation in the direction of personality-oriented education. However, the teachers, who studied general, developmental and pedagogical psychology more deeply, are more successful in using the psychological knowledge.
Young specialists are less successful because modern study plans for preparing a prospective teacher present psychological knowledge only partially, in a “fragmented” way. The lowest scores of the young teachers concern their readiness for developing school students’ personality- and axiological orientations (18,0%) and culture of thinking (17,0%).

**Task 4. Which psychological problems cause the most difficulties in your practical pedagogical activity:**

1. lack of interest toward knowledge in many students;
2. psychological specifics of adolescent students;
3. development of students’ skills;
4. individually-differentiated education.

The respondents’ results on this task are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Teachers’ responses (in % from the overall number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With experience under 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest toward knowledge in many students</td>
<td>74,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological specifics of adolescent students</td>
<td>66,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of students’ skills</td>
<td>67,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually-differentiated education</td>
<td>72,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in Table 4 and their comparison show that all of the problems presented in the task present difficulties in teacher’s practical work. Modern teachers find the most complicated problems to be related to the lack of interest toward knowledge in many students, especially in the adolescent ones. Moreover, teachers with less than 3 years of work experience find it very difficult to develop students’ skills (67,0% of choices), as well as to organize individually-differentiated education (72,0% of choices).

The obtained data point to the need in increasing the attention toward the abovementioned problems in the process of teaching the students in the university, which can be made possible by introducing elective courses in the study plans and organizing the corresponding trainings. Analysis of the results allowed concluding that one of the ways to solve such task might be the used of task-oriented approach to the development of psychological culture of a modern teacher and his psychological readiness to use the psychological knowledge in the educational activity.

It is necessary to focus specifically on the development of a system of tasks that can be included in the content of practical lessons both with the students and with the teachers in the system of professional development.

We present some of such problems as an example.
Task 1. The national psychology (L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontyev, S.L. Rubinshteyn) contains the following statements that act as the theoretical foundation of education organization:

- Any internal mental phenomenon is a transformed and interiorized external phenomenon; at first, a psychological function acts as inter-psychological, and then, as intra-psychological;

- Mental processes and activity are a unity but not an equality: mental processes develop in the activity, and activity is mentally regulated.

How can these theoretical statements be actualized in practice?

This task implies the actualization of psychological knowledge and their transfer to the specific pedagogical situations.

Task 2. Criteria of optimal state of the educational process include the statement by the recognized national psychologist L.S. Vygotsky about the “zone of proximal development”.

What is your understanding of the interaction between the concept of “zone of proximal development” and “optimal state of the educational process”?

This task implies the actualization of knowledge that is the most significant for solving the problem of individually-differentiated education. They give a teacher an orientation to pedagogically-reasonable actions.

Task 3. Provide the definitions of the concepts of “need”, “motive”, “interest”. Explain their difference and interaction.

The task implies reproduction of knowledge related to conceptual apparatus; it is aimed at establishing the interaction between psychological and didactic knowledge.

Task 4. S.L. Rubinshteyn states: “The concept of activity is necessarily related to the concept of motive. Activity cannot exist without motive”.

Prove that the motivational aspect of educational activity is its essential characteristic.

This task implies the reasoning with the use of the concept of “need”.

Task 5. What is your understanding of the concept of “availability”, “difficulty”, “complication”? How do they correspond with the individual approach to education?

This task implies that the student should specify not only certain concepts but also the need to regard them during the conduction of individualization principle in education.

Task 6. The concept of “learning” is addressed from the perspective of different sciences.

Which content do national psychologists attribute to it?

This task implies that students reason learning as a specific type of activity.

Task 7. How do you understand personality-oriented approach from the perspective of teacher and student?

Doing this task implies reasoning from the position of defining subjectivity in organization and conductance of the educational process.

Task 8. The researchers proposed the principle of learning at the high level of difficulty as one of the principles of developmental learning. Explain the essence of this principle. Provide examples of actualizing this principle on the material of a specific educational subject.
This task implies the situation of practical application of knowledge of the fundamentals of developmental learning.

Task 9. In the pedagogical practice, teachers often decrease the difficulty of the educational tasks for children who experience learning difficulties. Evaluate critically such pedagogical decision.

Performing this task implies convincing illustration of fallibility of such approach in teachers’ work.

Task 10. Some teachers propose the students to choose from the tasks of various difficulty, but during the evaluation of the tasks, they give the highest grade (“5”) for correctly solved task of the highest difficulty, average grade (“4”) for the less difficult task and lowest grade (“3”) for correctly solved easiest task. Evaluate the legitimacy of such approach by the teacher. Reason your response from the perspective of individually-differentiated approach.

When students perform such tasks, it allows the teacher to reveal the general difficulties and typical flaws, which include: a) incomplete and imprecise reproduction of psychological and pedagogic knowledge and necessity of their specification or correction; b) lack of the ability to analyze the pedagogical situation with the use of knowledge in psychology and general pedagogics; c) difficulties in examples that illustrate their own reasoning.

As regards the students, during the work with such tasks, they comprehend that the results of students’ educational activity highly depend on the proficiency of teacher’s use of psychological knowledge and reflection and consideration of students’ cognitive needs, their individual differences and abilities. This brings the students to realizing the need for psychological knowledge and the necessity of their constant enrichment.

One of the forms of practical use of students’ psychological knowledge is an educational internship. During these internships, individual tasks provide an opportunity for conducting students’ work on self-exploration, self-analysis, self-diagnostics and construction of an ideal Self.

In our opinion, educational internships should be preceded by introductory lessons that should include solving the problems of applied nature. They should contain psychological situations that are as close to the real pedagogical activity as possible. They can be presented as a certain plot, or in form of problem-oriented tasks.

We would like to present examples of such tasks that the students solve before entering the educational internship in school.

Task 1. There are three main models of a teacher: organizational, therapeutic and liberal. Each of them consists of beliefs on how teacher should act and who he should be, which relationships have to occur between teacher and student, as well as what is the level of responsibility of teacher and student. In other words, model of a teacher is very important for defining the nature of activity and interactions in a class.

Provide brief characteristics of the abovementioned models of a teacher sing the knowledge from the course in general and pedagogical psychology.

Task 2. Educational process includes strategies that are aimed at helping the students to reach the defined goals. These strategies are: communication, leadership, motivation and control.

Using the knowledge in pedagogical psychology, propose several types of teacher’s behavior that would reflect the strategies listed above.

Task 3. The theory of E. Erikson had a significant effect on psychoanalysis, on psychology in general and on developmental psychology in particular. This theory is very important for a teacher, because it provides him the necessary information about...
Continue the text by explaining the practical significance of E. Erikson’s theory for a teacher.

Task 4. Russian scientist L.S. Vygotsky was often referred to internationally as “the Mozart of psychology”, a true genius. By the age of 28, he studied all of the most recognized psychological theories at that moment and began developing a new theory that was based on completely new paradigms.

Recall and name the three main principles that lie at the basis of L.S. Vygotsky’s theory. Which is their meaning for the organization of personality-oriented educational process in school?

Task 5. Recall the main statements of the theory of forgetting and provide examples of their pedagogical use.

Task 6. The main goal of using the intellect testing is the prognosis. Provide examples of the traditional methods of measuring individual’s level of intellect, which allow performing a prognosis of the development of the learning skills.

Task 7. How can the nature of educational lessons be modified so that they could stimulate development of students’ creativity?

Task 8. The use of computers in education has positive consequences. Along with this, a pessimistic point of view is also highly common: wide spread of computers leads to a decline of reading and arithmetic skills, causes increase of violence, and can depersonalize education in schools.

Using the knowledge in general and pedagogical psychology, prove the correctness of these statements.

Task 9. Many practicing teachers notice rapid decrease of learning motivation in the modern school students. Explain this phenomenon according to the theory of motivation.

Task 10. List the actions that a teacher has to perform in order to stimulate his own development aimed at proficiency.

We provided only a small part of tasks and problems that can act as a mean for developing students’ readiness to use psychological knowledge in the real pedagogical practice. As our work experience has shown, task-oriented approach allows transcending the formality of mastering psychological knowledge by the students; it increases the interest toward their practical use, improves pedagogical literacy and helps overcoming the difficulties. This is confirmed by students’ responses that we obtained during the survey for the following question: “In which cases you did not experience difficulties during the educational internship?”:

Helping the children in setting and reaching educational goals (72,2% of responses);
Creating and maintaining discipline during the lessons (61,0% of responses);
Motivating children to master new knowledge (67,0% of responses);
Organizing conflict-free communication with the children (59,0% of responses);
Developing school students’ intellectual skills (57,0% of responses);
Planning one’s own and students’ actions (69,0% of responses);
Developing individuality in learning (54,0% of responses).

4. Conclusion
One of the complicated and pedagogically significant problems of pedagogical psychology is the...
problem of difficulties that a teacher encounters in his professional activity. Although the phenomenon of difficulties per se, areas of difficulties and reasons for their occurrence were repeatedly discussed in the national literature, they occurred again at this stage of the educational-practice development – primarily in relation to the actualization of personality-oriented education in practice.

Its results highly depend on teacher’s personality, his professional pedagogical training in general, and the level of pedagogical culture in particular. The result of teacher’s activity contains not only such functional products, as didactic projects (lessons and their types, pedagogical technologies, etc.), but also psychological products of activity (new psychological formations in student’s personality, development of his skills, etc.).

Evaluation of teacher’s readiness and his abilities to create psychological products have to be studied systematically in order to correct and improve them. One of the methods of such studying might be self-evaluation and self-esteem, which allow obtaining the data on the level of teacher’s proficiency in certain professional knowledge and abilities. Based on these methods, during specially organized study, we established that the lowest level of readiness to actualize psychological knowledge while solving pedagogical tasks was displayed by the beginner teachers with less than 3 years of work experience. In our opinion, one of the reasons of such pattern in insufficient “psychological orientation” of professional pedagogic training of the prospective teachers, which requires not only improving the content of the present educational standards, but also actually integrating psychological and pedagogic knowledge in the process of teaching the students.

Another condition for solving the problem has to become the improvement of the educational process technologies, in particular, enhancement of the role of task-oriented approach in developing students’ individual experience in using psychological knowledge in real educational practice.

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