Professional Training of Social Workers: Development of Professionally Significant Qualities in the Future Social Workers

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ABSTRACT

Today, the traditional approach to professional training is obsolete. This problem has determined the need to create new didactic forms related to the organization of training in the modern education system. The purpose of this study was to analyze possible development of professionally important qualities and abilities in the future social care teachers through the role plays. The value of role plays lies in their diagnostic, developmental, training, correctional, educational and psychotherapeutic potential. Role plays provide development of personal and professional attitude of the future social worker, along with approximation to the chosen profession. Different types of role plays give the possibility to model quasi-professional situations, realizing the future propaedeutic socio-pedagogical activity of students. Role plays has a positive impact on the development of competencies related to social interaction: the ability to constructively resolve conflicts; competent communication with different groups of people; willingness to build tolerant relations with people of different nationalities, religions, ethnic groups, political and ideological convictions, etc. The use of role plays in the training of social workers provided deliberate and purposeful use of group therapy in practical activities as well as active learning methods, pedagogical correction and social diagnosis. It was important that the game fostered mastering diverse behaviours by students. Using various types of role plays in the psychological and pedagogical training proved to be very useful and promising for professional and personal development of the future social care workers.

Introduction

Presently, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, significant political and economic reforms that determined the need to develop the state support system of the population, broadening and deepening the scope of social work, defined a new component of general and professional education - social care education, which content involves professional socialization, in other words, training the subjects of social work (Minzhanov, 2012). This type of activity is impossible without close contact between the workers that's why the International Federation of Social

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Workers (IFSW) determined the following tasks for the Republic of Kazakhstan (Minzhanov et al, 2013).

1. Promoting the development of social work as a profession through cooperation based on professional values, standards, ethics, human rights, training and working conditions.

2. Improving involvement of social workers in the development and implementation of social welfare policies.

3. Expansion and deepening the development of educational bachelor-level training programs (program track - "Social Work").

4. Comprehensive implementation of its values and professional standards.

5. Promoting cooperation among social workers of all countries.

6. Establishing and maintaining relations with international organizations dealing with social development and welfare.

7. Improving the social education system.

Professional training of future social care workers presents a system of organizational and educational measures aimed at the development of professional skills in the future specialists, as well as knowledge and skills obtained through studying educational subjects and by means of different types of practices, which contributes to the development of professional readiness in the future social experts (Ring, 2014).

Background Paper

Based on the theoretical analysis, the authors of this research identified several approaches to the training of future social care professionals. Modern foreign and domestic pedagogy is characterized by a number of different approaches to training the future professionals.

Professional training based on a student-centered approach

Presently, the traditional approach to training is obsolete (Firsov 2007; Rock & Corbin, 2007). This problem has determined the need to create new didactic forms related to the organization of training in the modern education system (Kurbatov, 2003). The student-centered approach presents one of the new forms used to organize professional training, which is an alternative to traditional training (Starshinov, 2008). According to this approach, only disclosing the individuality of each student in the learning process can provide the development of education in modern higher educational institutions (Facchini & Tonon Giraldo, 2012).

The term "student-centered approach" is widespread in today's research and teaching environment (Mukhametzyanova, 2000). The student-centered approach in the modern professional training system is focused on the learning process and on its final goal: the main question is "What to be?" in contrast to the question "Whom to be?" (Shmelev, 2005).

The student-centered approach to professional training is based on recognizing individuality, identity, self-worth of each student, his development not as a "collective subject," but above all, as an individual endowed with his/her own unique "subjective experience" (Karpenko, 2004). The inclusion of "subjective experience" into the learning (mastering) process implies organization of personal activities on the basis of individual needs, interests and aspirations (Druzhinin,

2012). It is also necessary to use individual study methods and personal assimilation mechanisms, being guided by personal attitudes to learning activities (Malmberg-Heimone et al., 2015).

The specificity of this approach in the training of social care workers lies in the selection, consideration and development of several unique qualities, such as kindness, tolerance, etc. in the students enrolled in the specialty "Social Work" (Smith, 2005; Rimmer & Harwood, 2004). Thus, the student-centered approach is based on the fact that any person presents the unity of mental properties belonging to his/her individuality; its technology implies an important psycho-pedagogical principle of individual approach, which implies due regard to individual characteristics of each student in the course of professional training (Karpenko, 2007; Deglau et al., 2015).

Training based on a system approach

The increased role of the human factor in different spheres of social life and social activity determines complex requirements to the professionalism of university graduates (Topchiy, 1997). There is the all-round demand for highly qualified social care workers being able to provide creative solution of complex problems, predicting and modelling the results of their own professional activity, finding ways and means of self-expression and self-affirmation in the context of practical, independent work (Roh et al., 2015).

To date, one can notice a low level of readiness of the future experts to provide creative performance of professional functions and innovative solutions (Webber et al., 2010). The underestimation of the scientific approach to solving the training problems, inappropriate readiness to professional activity and inappropriate use of this method by social care workers provide the possibility to conclude that scientific research potential is still insufficiently used in the training of social care workers (Panov, 1995).

The system approach is viewed as organization of professional training, in which all the components interdependent, characterized by constant reflection and correction of results, the creation of conditions providing its efficiency, development of personal qualities of the future expert, providing solution of professional problems "outside the box", making full use of innovative technologies and professional activity (Platonova, 2011; Scurlock-Evans & Upton, 2015).

The system approach involves defining training goals and objectives, as well as development of the training concept (main directions, their implementation strategies, programs and techniques) of the future social workers; determination of the system structural components; the nature of relationship between them; identification of levels and criteria for assessing the training effectiveness (Garashkina, 2004).

Professional training based on the integrative approach

The integrative approach is considered from the perspective of integration of the theory and practice of occupational training:

1. An approach and process that enables intrinsically combining various aspects and trends of reality based on common goals, content, and structure (Usmanova, 2009).

2. In educational practice – a combination, an intrinsic merging of educational systems, content of educational programs, research concepts and approaches (Kremneva, 2005).

Using the integrative approach when training specialists is becoming a top priority for the improvement of the quality of vocational education (Dodds, 2010). Integration in education is not a mechanical connection of parts, but an interpenetration that produces a new quality result of all-round education (Ramon & Sarri, 1996). The properties of a system as a holism cannot be reduced to the sum of properties of its parts. All elements, processes, and relations within this system depend on the structural principle of organization of an integral whole (Tsui, 2015). At that, the interconnections of components may be expressed in various forms: as their complementary correspondence, potential connections, structural and functional relations, interactive connections, hierarchic connections, and management and regulation connections. In these conditions, the integrative essence and content of social education is determined by life itself, changes in the content and structure of professional activity, its functions and objectives (Markov, 1996).

It is worth noting that the integrative approach in its modern interpretation is an integration of the personality with the future professional activity, i.e. a combination of competence as personality traits, fundamental knowledge, skills, and abilities (Kulichenko & Simonovich, 2009).

Integration during learning implies intertwined and coordinated educational tasks from various subjects, expansion of interdisciplinary links, regulated extension of the content of school courses. Integration is regarded not as a generalization and summation, but as a dynamic, as a direction towards continuity.

Integration in occupational training is a two-sided process – internal and external (Garashkina, 2012):

• External integration is required to avoid overlapping subjects in the educational field, to coordinate and synchronize learning tasks, to extend the content at the level of industry-specific training.

• The organization of learning, which is based on the optimal choice of general didactic educational forms, methods, techniques, and means is the internal aspect of integration.

Thus, the process and the result of the creation of an intrinsically connected and unified whole in education is achieved by several means. Firstly, by uniting in a single synthesized course (topic, section, program) the elements of different academic subjects, adding the fundamentals of different sciences, and discovering interdisciplinary connections. Secondly, by emphasizing the characteristics of the same phenomenon when studying different disciplines, which does not require special academic courses.

The important aspect is that the occupational training of prospective specialists for social work based on an integrative approach focuses on qualitative indicators, new educational principles and technologies, and bridges the gap between the general cultural and professional components in education and various practices, which provides for professional readiness for future labor (Cannon & Buttell, 2014).

Thus, the occupational training of prospective specialists for social work in high school education is a system of organizational and pedagogical measures that

develops occupational direction in future specialists, as well as knowledge, skills, and abilities through the study of academic disciplines and various types of internship, which helps to develop professional readiness for social work in future specialists (Cheung, 2015).

Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the possibility of developing professionally important qualities and abilities in prospective social teachers using the game method.

Research questions

The overarching research question of this study was as follows:

Is it possible to develop professionally important qualities and abilities in prospective social teachers using the game method?

Methods

The studied sample included high school students of both sexes. The age of respondents ranged from 19 to 21. The total number of males was 23; the total number of females was 38. The study was carried out among the students of the Karaganda Economic University (Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan).

The level of development of professional and personal qualities in prospective social workers was determined based on ratings and rankings, self-diagnostics and mutual diagnostics, and analysis of various socio-pedagogical situations. Standard diagnostic methods, adapted to the peculiarities of student groups, were used to assess the effectiveness of the development of various qualities.

Analysis and Results

The goal of occupational training of prospective social workers in a pedagogical university is to develop their personal potential and to stimulate professionally important qualities and abilities. Using various forms and types of didactic games during university education helps to achieve this goal. The value of the game lies in its diagnostic, developing, teaching, correctional, educating, and psychotherapeutic potential. Games develop the personal and professional position of prospective social workers and bring them closer to their occupation of choice (Telyatnikov, 1990).

Various types of games enable creating quasi-professional situations by carrying out propedeutics of the future socio-pedagogical activity of students (Zhalagina, 2003). Goodwill, equality, and an atmosphere of general dedication and trust – all this not only has a positive effect on the academic performance, but also helps to improve the student's self-esteem and change is or her status in the group.

The content of psycho-pedagogical and socio-pedagogical subjects enables using various games: intellectual, role, business, imitation, etc.

Students' participation in a game situation helps them to gain experience of work, search, decision-making and decision coordination in groups in an uncertain situation. Experience that was gained during the game can help to develop a humanistic attitude and tolerant behavioral models in prospective social workers (Kapskaya et al., 2003).

During the psychological and pedagogical training, students gain subjective experience of using intellectual, business, and role plays. Business games combine the social and subject-specific context, model conventional activity, and simulate systems of multidimensional relationships. The preparation of university teachers to business games is a lengthy and multistage process:

1. Choosing the object of the game, determining the models and the storyline.

2. Preliminary elaboration of the game process, adaptation to the peculiarities of a student group.

3. Choosing and describing the roles.

4. Development of techniques for stimulating students.

5. Selection of necessary blocks of documents and other materials.

An important feature of role plays is their diversity, high degree of emotional tension and participants' personal involvement. All these characteristics were fully manifested in the collaborative designing and playing games such as "Social worker's interview with a client", "Interaction of school psychologist and social worker", "Social worker at a parent-teacher meeting", "Socio-pedagogical consultation". Role plays are a more economical and less time-consuming option of gaming technology. They stimulate students' flexibility and freedom of role choice; they teach them to act responsibly in alternative situations. There are a variety of role-plays used in the laboratory and practical lessons in the "Social pedagogy" study course, such as "Conflict with parents", "Counselor private conversation with student's parents", "Success modelling for different students", "Children interaction organization in the context of inclusive education". The original settings can often change in the same role-play during seminar or practical classes, developing not fragmented, but holistic perception of pedagogical reality in students.

The game has a significant potential for the creative personality development in students, building a special "creative environment" (Sitnikov, 1996). The sense of liberty, a friendly atmosphere in the classroom, coercion or pressure absence on the part of a teacher stimulates the creativity development in future counselors.

At seminars and practical lessons on psychology, pedagogy, "social work" disciplines students played out challenging options, unconventional behavior models for the social worker in difficult situations. Game symbols and attributes helped to remove students' anxiety: future social workers participated in the scenario design and the roles performance. Role-plays were used to develop the professional and personal qualities of future social workers: subjectivity, confidence, expressiveness, responsibility, creativity. Gaming develops the ability to self-regulate and control emotional and mental state.

Intellectual ("What? Where? When?" "Brain-ring") and simulation games ("Shipwrecked", "Robinson Crusoe" and others) were used in practical classes on pedagogical, developmental, social psychology, social pedagogy and social work. Democracy, openness and limited answer time creates considerable intellectual and emotional tension of players.

In intellectual games, students can perform the role of "scholar", "idea generator", "critic" or "skeptic". Intellectual games help to develop the fastest response in unpredictable situations, encourage thinking flexibility and diversity.

When studying the course "Pedagogical psychology" and "Educational technology", the students considered psychological and pedagogical conditions of

effective game activity, and were acquainted with the possible negative game effects: the dehumanization of interpersonal relations and individual status decrease in the group.

Hard participants' commitment to win can cause interpersonal conflict. The playing position validity, the students' prudent choice of roles helps to prevent such complications.

The game has great potential in the students' reflection development. Each game ended with individual and group reflection, students learned to analyze their role behavior in the context of professional ethics, identifying personal difficulties and successes, choosing arguments to justify their position. Game convention allowed creating a reflective and developmental space, stimulating the inclusion of students into the dialogue. The students were critical to themselves as future professionals. The game liberates: young people express their views and feelings more freely and openly, they accept their own emotions and the emotions of fellow students, they are ready for an immediate emotional response.

In the process of experimental work, the number of students who began to use the games in their job training has increased. Students appreciated the games' positive impact on the interpersonal relations in the group and on the development of their professional and personal qualities. Future counselors and social workers noted that they began to use gaming more confident, taking cue from the children's age, psychological characteristics and their own possibilities.

Discussion and Conclusions

The game has a positive impact on the competencies' development related to social interaction with other people: the ability to resolve conflicts constructively; to communicate with diverse groups of people competently; willingness to build tolerant relationships with people of different nationalities, religions, ethnic groups, political and ideological beliefs, etc. (Kleyberg, 2006).

The game use in the process of social workers' training helped them to include group therapy, active learning methods, pedagogical correction and social diagnosis into the production practice.

It is equally important that students mastered the diverse behavior patterns in the game. Different types of games proved to be very useful and promising for professional and personal development of future professionals (Skutneva, 2006).

Students' participation in gaming activities has a positive impact on their qualities' formation such as subjectivity, creativity, responsibility, expressiveness, tolerance, empathy and reflection.

Implications and Recommendations

Games usage as a way of students' professional qualities and abilities development has the following implications and recommendations:

1. The creation of the professionally oriented educational environment;

2. The formation of professional reasons and value orientations for social workers;

3. The formation of special knowledge, abilities and skills required for further employment in the education field.

Data obtained in the course of study confirm that the gaming method may help to form necessary professional qualities in future social workers: professional competence and creation of favorable socio-psychological climate in the team, which will contribute to the students ' personality development.

Disclosure statement

There was no potential conflict of interest reported by the authors.

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