Phenomenological Analysis of Professional Identity Crisis Experience by Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The topicality of the problem under research is predetermined by the need of psychology and pedagogy for the study of the process of professional identity crisis experience by teachers and development of a system of measures for support of teachers' pedagogical activity and professional development. The objective of the study is to describe the content of the process of professional identity crisis experience by teachers. The principal method of study of this problem is the phenomenological method, which provides for exploration of the main aspects of the experience process. The results of phenomenological method application for the analysis of professional crisis experience make it possible to state that the professional crisis issue is a specific life situation for labourer where in the alteration of the teacher's general view of life occurs. The experience of professional identity crisis manifests itself in the polarization of evaluations of the main parameters of the professional and the Self-image (the external activity evaluation, interest in the activity, the control over professional activity and professional situations, professional prospects). Transformation of the notional field of a teacher's consciousness and reflection (the content of the activity, relation and the proper behaviour in general) are distinguished as the mechanisms of professional crisis experience. The materials of the article may be useful for teachers, psychologists, and heads of educational institutions in the process of planning and implementation of activities on educational process psychological support.

Introduction

A specific feature of the present-day economic situation in the world in general and in the country, in particular, is the transformation of the existing social institutes which produces changes in every field of social life and a serious

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re-evaluation of social relations system. The permanent education system reformation, the change of the educational paradigm, introduction of Federal State Education Standards (FSES), the change of approaches to the arrangement of educational process, the change of organizational and legal status of the educational organization (including all consequences) result in the change of the content-related and technological aspects of education. The guaranty of successful educational system transformation and achievement of the goals set is a freely and actively thinking teacher, able to fore see the results of his/her activity and model the educational process. Special significance for his/her activity and professional development under the new circumstances is given to the ability of permanent self-identification, self-formation as a professional, designing of new professional development routes and crossing psychological barriers of this search.

However, as may be seen from the research practice, the majority of teachers experience adaptation problems in the rapidly changing social and economic and professional circumstances. Unreadiness to re-evaluate their part in the present-day educational process and inability to solve the occurring professional problems (which may include internal and external conflicts, crisis situations, stress etc.) may provoke serious social and psychological trouble with teachers: from the increase of internal dissatisfaction up to the boost of social confrontation and aggression. Disaffection with work, internal conflicts, the feeling of the loss of sense of work, the loss of professional prospect in many cases become the factors in creasing the number of obstacles on the way to the teacher's professional development and evoking the experiencing of professional crisis by the teachers.

Professional identity crisis is a kind of "transitional" point, bifurcation point, and crossing this point predetermines the further route of professional and personal development, providing the transfer to the further stage of professional establishment or causing stagnation of the teacher, as well as his/her professional degradation.

The crisis is a short-term life period accompanied by cardinal reformation of the subject of activity, the change of activity (Symanyuk & Devyatovskaya, 2015). The crisis affects the field of the professional directionality of personality: motivation, needs, values, senses; it "forces" the individual to build up the boundaries of its value- and sense-focused field, actualizes the process of experience. The key specific features of professional identity crisis experience process are: 1) localization in time and space; 2) non-stability of vision and thinking of oneself as a professional, the loss of professional identity; 3) vague temporal professional prospects or absence of the prospect, with consequent actualization of the need for choice of further professional life development; 4) actualization of life-sense emotions which manifest themselves in decreased aspiration for self-development, self-affirmation, self-actualization, the feeling of his/her own uselessness and worthlessness; 5) persistent affective response, tension (Sadovnikova, 2014).

The rise of professional identity crisis is characterized by the generation of self-diffidence, inner conflict, awareness of the necessity of self-revaluation, the vaguenessof life goals, the lack of understanding of how to live on, the loss of feeling of novelty, being behind the times etc. It is possible to state that professional identity crisis is the situation of "impossibility" to implement the

internal professional concept, the situation when the individual is set a "sense-making task" which requires solution (Sadovnikova, 2009).

With all the diversity of professional crises, the issue of solution of the professional crisis and definition of its essence remains unresolved as of today.

Professional identity crisis concerns the identity consciousness stratum and causes the transformation thereof (similar to the identity crisis); therefore, studying the way of solution of the professional crisis by the identity, it is reasonable to use the category of "experience". It is the category of experience that makes it possible for a researcher to reveal the content of the internal activity starting in the consciousness of a person which found itself in a professional crisis situation; the activity which makes it possible to eliminate the conflict between existence and consciousness.

Methodological framework

Research methods

The following methods have been used for the research: theoretical (literature analysis, modelling); empirical (phenomenological semi-structured interview, content-analysis); mathematical statistics and graphical results presentation.

Experimental facilities for the research

Experimental basis for the research w were the educational institutions of Sverdlovsk oblast of the Russian Federation.

Research stages

The problem research was carried out in 3 stages:

— At the first stage of the research theoretical analysis of literature sources on the problem of professional crisis, the experience was made. The content of the phenomenological semi-structured interview was developed.

— At the second stage of the research empirical data was collected.

— At the third stage of the research content-analysis of teachers' self-reports was performed and mathematical analysis of data with graphic results presentation was performed.

Results

Experience is an internal work on the restoration of mental balance and elimination of the conflict between the existence and the consciousness characterizing the uniqueness of an individual's internal world, its consciousness, and life in general.

Taking this fact into consideration, the traditional psychological measurement for research of the experience contents is impossible to use. To research the content of professional crisis experience it is purposeful to refer to the strategies of qualitative research, where phenomenological analysis belongs.

Let us consider the essence of phenomenological approach and its value for professional identity crisis experience research.

Today, the phenomenological approach is of a special topicality in the research of the structure of some experiences, the senses and a person's attitude

to something (Ulanovsky, 2012). It suggests the implementation of the "first person" methodology postulating the idea of non-reductibilityof experience. Its subject is the live experience, subjective practical knowledge, consciousness data, phenomena and phenomenal data (Varela & Shear, 1999; Ulanovsky, 2012).

Considering this fact, the phenomenological method "is a special method of description and analysis of a person's proper experiences based on the reflection and the principles of obviousness and absence of prerequisites; the method developed in the framework of phenomenological tradition and used today in the altered form as a qualitative research strategy" (Ulanovsky, 2012). The phenomenological method is referred to the qualitative research group due to the fact that it uses qualitative date – the words and utterances of the natural language reflecting the riches and depth of human experience. The phenomenological method focuses on the description of a subject's experiences, but not on the utterly observed actions and behaviour.

Let us consider the procedural aspects of the phenomenological method.

The phenomenological research uses three main data collection sources: test subjects' reports obtained in through research interview or presented in writing; reflexive self-reports of the researcher; personal documents and general cultural texts that contain anextended description of certain experience (Ulanovsky, 2012).

A test subject of phenomenological research may be any person having an appropriate experience and capable of giving at least a minimal description of such experience. The number of subjects in phenomenological research may differ. Some works point out the possibility of the use of extended reports of a single subject (Dukes, 1984); while the other works describe research wherein more than 300 subjects had taken part (Ulanovsky, 2012).

To study the professional identity crisis experience by teachers, we have developed a semi-structured phenomenological interview. The questions of the interview covered several aspects of professional identity crisis experience by teachers:

"General view of life and experiences prior to professional crisis development" – this block was aimed at the clarification of professional development situation prior to the professional crisis development. The teachers were offered to describe their view of life, prospect, attitude towards the profession and themselves. It was suggested to list the events preceding the development of the professional crisis.

"Experiences accompanying the professional personality crisis" – this block makes it possible to explain which aspects of professional life provoked the understanding that the teacher had faced the crisis situation, how the teacher had been perceiving the crisis situation if the teacher had the feeling of internal emptiness, the arrested development.

"Value- and sense-focused field transformation" – this block made it possible to explain the way the subject's priorities had been changing in the process of professional crisis experience, how the values re-evaluation occurred, where the teacher saw the sense of his/her professional development (professional activity) before the crisis, how the teacher changed while

experiencing the process of the crisis, how he/she saw his/her professional future.

"Overcoming the professional crisis" – this block is aimed at the detection and explanation of the professional crisis duration and what factor saided to overcome the crisis (personal qualities, social resources, etc.) etc.

The phenomenological interview is allowed to be conducted in the form of a written essay (Ulanovsky, 2012). The subjects were offered to recall their experiences related to the professional identity crisis and answer a number of questions concerning their professional development and professional activity. The performance of the task was not limited to the temporal framework, but in average it took the subjects 2.5 hours to complete the task.

In total, 25 teachers of secondary educational institutions took part in the research; the average working experience amounted to 8.6 years. All the subjects were female, the average age was 28.4.

In the context of our research, teachers with the experience of the professional crisis were of particular interest (it is one of the most important prerequisites of phenomenological research strategy application). Therefore, from the general sampling, we have selected 20 teachers having had such experience.

The research results processing required qualitative data analysis according to the following plan:

Marking the statements, the primary acquaintance with the text and pointing out significant statements, utterances completed in terms of their sense concerning the professional crisis experience. The boundaries of such statements are any distinguishable sense changeover and changes in the narration (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Adjustment of content-analytical categories selected based on theoretical literature analysis and primary acquaintance with the subjects' responses. As a result, the following categories and subcategories were distinguished:

Category A – general view of life prior to the professional identity crisis.

A1 –image of profession;

A11 – social significance of the profession;

A12 – interest in the activity;

A13 – creative self-actualization possibility;

A14 – professional prospect availability;

A2 –image of Self in the profession;

A21 – proactive attitude;

A22 – subjectivity, self-confidence;

A23 – self-identification with the profession;

A24 – self as viewed by others;

A3 – general emotional background;

A31 – exhilarated emotional background;

A32 – calm, smooth emotional background.

Category B – general view of life within the professional identity crisis.

B1 – image of profession within the period of crisis;

B11 – low social significance of the profession;

B12 –lack of interest in the activity;

B13 – routine nature of the activity;

B14 – lack of professional prospect;

B2 – image of Self within the period of crisis;

B21 – loss of control of activity and professional situations;

B22 – development arrest;

B23 – professional identity loss;

B24 – negative external evaluations of the activity;

B25 – self-esteem drop.

Category C – crisis experience.

C1 – emotional sufferings,

C11 – anxiety, fear;

C12 – anger, irritation;

C13 – sadness, emptiness;

C14 – desperation, hopelessness,

C15 –stress,

C2 – value and sense sphere transformation;

C21 – life sphere hierarchy change;

C22 – change of sense content of work;

C3 – reflection;

C31 – internal world reflection;

C32 – activity content reflection;

C33 – social environment reflection.

Category D – crisis overcoming activity.

D1 – the use of social resources;

D2 – personality resources actualization;

D3 – hobbies and interests;

D4 – change of the workplace;

D5 – change of profession;

D6– change of the type of activity.

In the process of statements encoding, we acquired a list of statements related to various aspects of professional crisis experience. Conditional name–codes were assigned to the statements to reflect their main idea.

Analysis and interpretation of the obtained data required calculation of subcategories percentage ratio and the research results description in the context of previously formulated theoretical views of the essence of professional crisis experience.

Let us consider the obtained results analysis.

In the process of the subjects' responses analysis, we have distinguished a total of 686 statements describing professional identity crisis experience by teachers.

The first direction of work with the teachers' self-reports was an analysis of the subjects' responses characterizing view of life prior to the crisis (Figure 1).
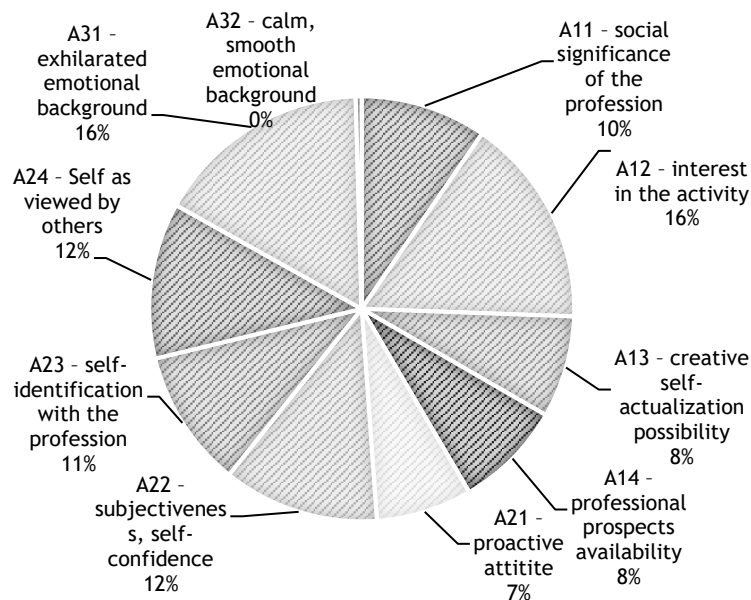

Figure 1. Correlation of the characteristics describing teachers' view of life prior to the professional crisis experience

Generalization of the responses allowed us to make a conclusion that the subjects described the time before the crisis as happy, bright, and interesting. The professional prospect and the future were clear. Here are some of the categories mentioned in the subjects' responses: "to be awarded a higher category", "develop myself as a teacher", "enormous prospect", "changing the stereotypes of impossibility to provide children with a high-quality education" etc.). All the teachers pointed out that they had seen the purpose of their work, perceived professional tasks with enthusiasm, inspiration ("the value of communication with parents and children", "children need me", "I wanted to pay more attention to the content of the work", "I sincerely believed that love for children is the most important characteristic for a teacher", "I saw the purpose in teaching the future generation" etc.). Probably, it is the way that the tendency to idealize the pre-crisis professional past manifests itself in the situation of the actual and/or past crisis.

The second direction of the teachers' responses analysis was determining the correlation of the categories characterizing general view of the teachers' life within the period of the professional identity crisis (Figure 2).
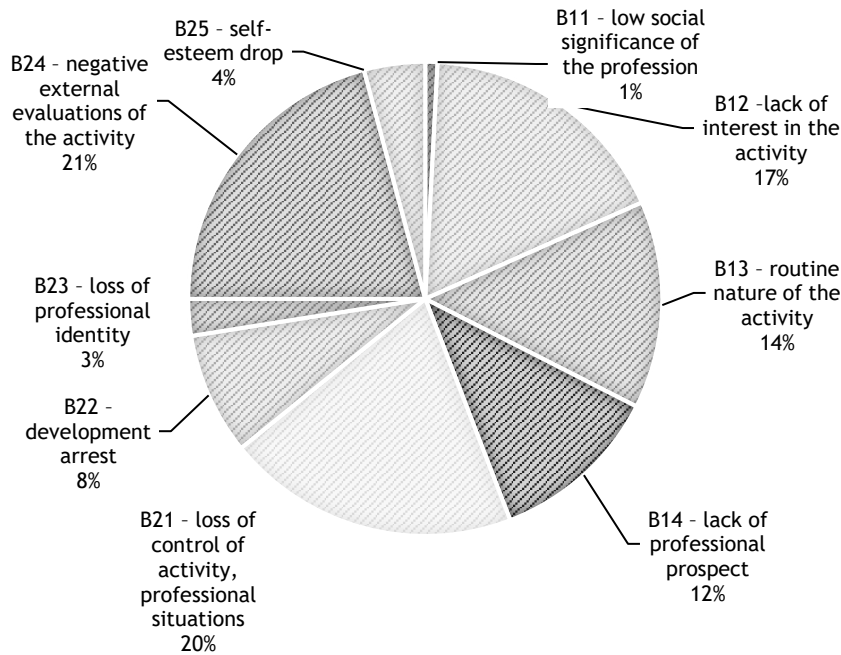
Figure 2. Correlation of the characteristics reflecting general view of life of the teachers within the period of professional identity crisis

Analysis of the teachers' responses characterizing professional crisis experience allowed us to make a conclusion that under critical circumstances teachers become keenly aware of their activity evaluation. Many people pointed out the occurrence of negative external evaluations: "the fear of disapproval", "I felt an odd fish", "I shall never become good enough", "perception of a colleague as a competitor", "gossip, pressure", "the lack of understanding from the superiors", "non-acceptance of me as a colleague" etc. (subcategory B24, 21%). Pedagogic activity suggests permanent feedback from the pupils, parents, colleagues and professional community in general. The job evaluation is valuable for teachers, and in the pre-crisis period description subcategoryA24 "Self as viewed by others" is frequently encountered (12% of indicators), however prior to the crisis the accent was made on acknowledgement, and positive evaluations, which is contrary to the crisis period, where the negative ones are emphasized.

Another category of frequent occurrence in the subjects' responses was the category "loss of control over activity, professional situations" (subcategory B21, 20%): "Ican do no right", "emptiness, and no new ideas", "I will never manage to do as I intend to", "I cannot make a decision" etc. The manifestations of subjectivity and self-confidence, characteristic for the perception of pre-crisis situation (subcategory A22 – 12% of indicators) are lost during the period of crisis which is one of the main sources of frustration alongside with the negative external evaluations.

A vague temporal professional prospect or absence thereof (subcategory B14, 12%),along with the subsequent actualization of the need for choice of

further professional life scenario manifested themselves in the following responses: "do I need this profession", "will it be interesting in future", "I wanted to change my job", "a sombre professional future", "the professional future is unchanging and it is only going to become worse" etc. During the pre-crisis period, the image of the profession also included both professional prospect and self-actualization prospect (subcategories A13 and A14 − 8%). As it is shown above, the professional prospect vagueness is one of the attributes of experiencing a professional identity crisis.

It should also be pointed out that the subjects indicated the lack of interest towards the profession during the period of professional crisis (subcategory B12, 17%) and routine nature of the activity (subcategory B13, 14%).

Comparison of the teachers' views of life prior to and during the professional identity crisis makes it possible to come to the intermediate conclusion that the image of the profession and the professional Self are formed up according to dichotomic principle. The teachers point out the same key moments but the crisis situation abruptly changes the sense of the situation evaluation from positive to negative. Neutral judgments in crisis description are not common for teachers; they are inclined to polar evaluations. It is possible that the polarization of professional situation evaluation is one of the mechanisms of professional identity crisis perception by the teachers at the primal stages of professionalization experiencing the professional expectations crisis. Evaluations categoricity, separation into "black" and "white" may also serve as an indirect testimony of deficient level of professional self-actualization, the immaturity of professional thinking.

The next direction of analysis was the determination of correlation of the characteristics describing the essence of professional crisis experiencing (Figure 3).
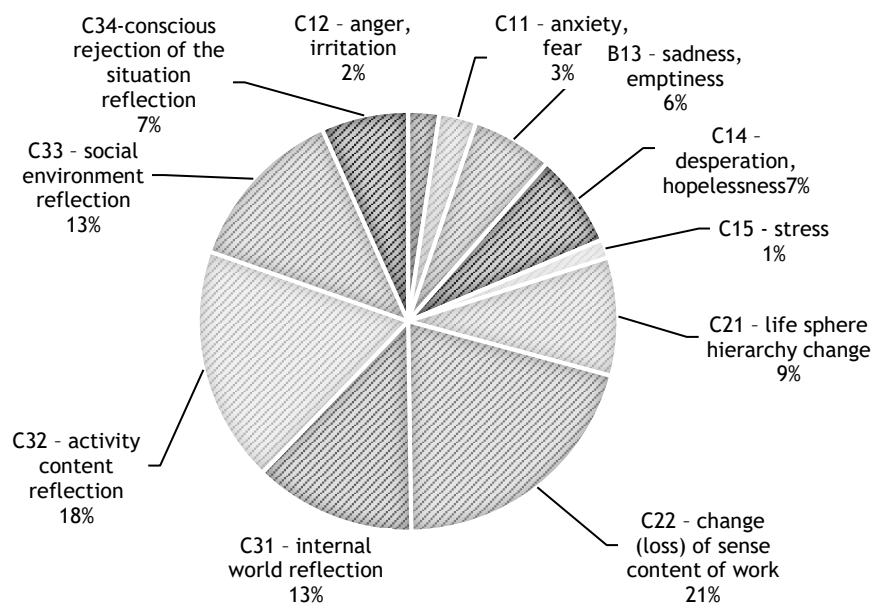
Figure 3. Correlation of the characteristics describing professional crisis experiencing by teachers

As may be seen from Figure 3, the principal aspect of the experience is related to the change of the sense content of the work (subcategory C22, 21%). Many teachers pointed out that: "it seemed that I was forgetting everything", "I no longer took the copy-books home to review them there", "I cannot understand if I need it all", "I came to respond to the parents' requirements in a lesser degree", "now I make myself go on through force of will, I perform my professional duties by habit, automatically", "now the purpose is to protect my own child from everything that happens in the kindergartens", "educational system greatly disappointed me", "now I perceive my activity in a different way" etc.

For many teachers professional crisis experience is accompanied by professional activity content reflection (subcategory C32, 18%), after that the internal world reflection (subcategory C31, 13%) and social environment reflection (subcategory C33, 13%) actualize.

Analysing the emotional content of experience we can note that the dominating emotions were "desperation and hopelessness" (subcategory C14, 7%). The teachers pointed out that: "I felt internal depletion", "emptiness", "I felt theemotional burnout", "the feeling of hopelessness, that nothing can be changed", "the desire to resign, abandon everything", "submission" etc.

In general, the results under category C comply with the source theoretical model of crisis experience. It is a particularly peculiar fact that the negative emotions which form general crisis course background are not registered by the teachers as often as the value and sense transformation and reflection. It can be explained by the fact that the emotional self-regulation of teachers is professionally developed, and the reflection and value aspects, being higher level mechanisms, are predominant.

An important constituent of the analysis was the analysis of correlation of the characteristics disclosing the process of professional crisis management (Figure 4).

As may be seen from the diagram, the majority of the answers fall into subcategory D2 – personality resource actualization. The teachers pointed out that in order to solve the professional crisis they required "patience and serenity", "I understood that if I cannot change the situation I should change the attitude to it", "self-confidence', "optimism", "confidence in my knowledge and abilities", "stress-resistance", "confidence that the crisis will come to an end, motivation" etc.

Quite important for professional crisis management were the social resources (subcategory D3, 26%). The subjects' self-reports contained the following answers: "I cooperated with other specialists", "I asked the family and the older teachers for help, we talked it over, clarified the situation", "I spoke to the person who knew the job features very well", "I spoke to the superiors who supported me with kind words".
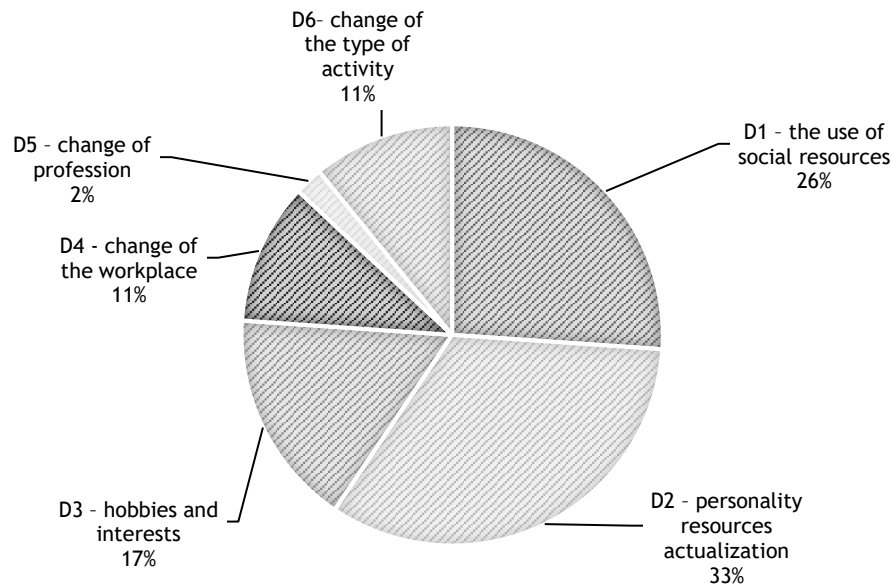
Figure 4. Correlation of the characteristics reflecting the activity of professional crisis overcoming by teachers

Personality resource engagement and seeking social support are, in our opinion, quite a constructive way of crisis overcoming, due to the fact that they allow the teacher to retain his/her professional status and stay in the profession.

Another constructive way out of the crisis is, in our opinion, subcategory D6 – change of the kind of activity (11%). This category encompasses the following answers: "at that period I submitted papers for higher education", "I understood that I had to do something and overcome the crisis situation", "I was suggested an interesting part-time job", "change the activity", "I participate in contests and win"etc.

So, the phenomenological analysis helped us disclose the content of the process of professional crisis experience by teachers.

Discussions

The category of experience is encountered in the works of both domestic and foreign researchers. Thus, the category of experience is most closely related to life philosophy within the framework whereof experience is an important attribute of human life, determining its character. However, the life of an individual, its culture, to which it belongs, as well as the social environment wherein it generally lives, set a kind of "boundaries", "standards" and even "depth" of the experience. At the same time, the experience is a psychical attribute. Experience is always something personal; the reflection of the whole human personality. Experience reflects and discloses the fullness of psychical aspect, including the person's values, senses, and beliefs (Dukhnovsky, 2005).

In the Russian psychology, it was L.S. Vygotsky (2001) who first applied the category of experience as one of the basic, primary characteristics of consciousness. According to him, experiences are analytical units within the process of cooperation between the personality and the environment. Experience

is by definition the unit in an indecomposable form representing, on the one hand, the environment (the emotions experienced), and, on the other hand, the way it is experienced. L.S. Vygotsky (2001) considers experiencing an activity of psychological world recreation aimed at the establishment of the sense correspondence between the consciousness and the objective reality.

According to S.L. Rubinshtein (1998) experience, in the specifically emphasized sense of the word, may refer to a psychical phenomenon which became an event in the personality's internal life. Experience is determined by personal context due to the fact that the things significant for a person become an experience.

A.N. Leontiev (1981) pointed out that the way a person experiences a subject within the objective reality is determined by the person's attitude towards this subject – by the content of its activity implementing this attitude. Experience manifests itself on every instance of human activity but it is neither this activity nor the reason thereof, because, prior to becoming a reason, it is a consequence itself.

After the introduction to the composition of personality sense within the context of activity theory by A.N. Leontiev (1981), this category analysis within the activity approach can be found in the works of F.Ye. Vasilyuk (1984).

According to F.Ye. Vasilyuk (1984), the essence of experience is as follows: when a person experiences a loss it had suffered, the main thing for its relatives is the care of how such person would manage to withstand the suffering, the ordeal, overcome the crisis and restore mental balance, psychologically cope with the situation. Here some active, resultative process is implied, actually transforming the psychological situation, an experience-action. The need for survival arises within a person on especially critical life occasions when it is impossible to continue the previous mode of life and implement the internal necessities of the life (motivation, aspiration, values). Such critical situations in a person's life are stress, frustration, conflict and crisis. The experience becomes a restoration work for a person experiencing a critical situation, and its purpose is acquiring the sense of further life. Phenomenological prerequisite of experience is the situation of the impossibility of the desired changes, thesatisfaction of needs, achievement of goals, implementation of values etc.

Analysing the present-day state of psychology, L.R. Fakhrutdinova (2012) points out that the difficulty of experience essence disclosure is caused by thecultural and historical context of the development of this category. Analysing experience process phenomenology, the author also considers the category of "experience" from the viewpoint of its priority and belonging to the context of conciseness as a primary element having the status of an independent, primary basis phenomenon.

In general, three aspects using the term "experience" may be distinguishedin psychological research (Asmolov, 1990):

1. Experience as "any appellative real-life phenomenon directly presented in the subject's consciousness and acting for such subject as an event of his/her own individual life".

2. Understanding of experiences as aspirations, desires, and wishes directly representing within an individual consciousness a process of the choice of

motivations and activity objectives made by the subject and therefore participating in the determination of the activity processes.

3. Experience, like any form of activity occurring in the critical situation of the impossibility of the achievement of the leading motivation and life expectations by a subject, a collapse of ideals and values. The result of this activity is the transformation of psychical reality.

As may be seen from the theoretical analysis, the category of experience is not used within the context of professional crisis study. In turn, the necessity of addressing the category of experience in the professional identity crisis research is predetermined by the fact that professional crisis is not only a stress situation for a personality, however,it certainly is. The professional crisis is a situation when an individual is unable to implement its professional plans, a situation where it is impossible to live, implement the internal need of life, situation when a "sense-making task" that needs to be solved is set before the individual. It is the category of experience that allows a researcher to disclose the content of the internal activity deploying in the consciousness of a person that found itself in the situation of professional crisis; activity helping to eliminate the conflict between the actual reality and the consciousness.

Conclusion

Thus, the article provides the results of phenomenological analysis of professional identity crisis experience by teachers. The main conclusion of this research is the fact that the situation of professional identity crisis initiates an experiencingprocess in a person's consciousness. Generalization of the teachers' feedback made it possible to state that the time prior to the professional crisis was described by the subjects as happy, bright, interesting and meaningful. Professional assignments were perceived by the teachers with enthusiasm and inspiration.

During the crisis situation, teachers start to acutely perceive theevaluation of their activity, feel the lack of control over the activity and professional situations. Manifestations of subjectivity and self-confidence specific for the perception of the pre-crisis professional situation become lost within the period of crisis, which is one of the driving experience sources alongside with the negative external evaluations.

A bleak temporal professional prospect or the absence of the prospect and the subsequent actualization of the further professional life scenario choice is another aspect of professional identity crisis overcoming by teachers. During the pre-crisis period, the image of the profession included both professional plans and the possibilities of self-actualization. It should also be noted that the subjects pointed out the lack of interest in the activity and the routine nature of activity within the professional crisis period.

Comparison of characteristics of the teachers' view of life prior to and during the professional identity crisis period let us make a conclusion that the images of theprofession and professional Self are built according to the dichotomic principle.

Besides, in the process of the research, it was found that the principal aspect of the teachers' professional identity crisis experience by is related to changes in the sense context of work. For many teachers, professional crisis

experience is accompanied by reflection of professional activity content, and after that, the internal world and social environment reflection is actualized.

Self-reports analysis also revealed the presence of negative emotional experiences. However, a matter of particular interest is the fact that the negative emotional experiences which constitute the general background for the course of crisis are registered by the teachers not as often as the transformation and reflection of the value and sense sphere. It can be explained by the fact that the emotional self-regulation of teachers is especially developed and the reflexive and sense aspects of the experience, being higher level mechanisms, prevail.

An important component of the analysis was revealing the characteristics that disclose the process of overcoming the professional crisis. As may be seen from the results, the professional identity crisis is overcome through personality resources actualization and search for social resources. Personality resources actualization and search for social support are, in our opinion, quite a constructive way of crisis management due to the fact that it facilitates the teacher to retain his/her professional status, and stay in the profession.

The results obtained add to the ideas of the essence of experience. A doubtless novelty of the research is disclosure of specific psychological features and mechanisms of professional identity crisis experience by teachers.

The research results may serve as a basis for designing the system of psychological and pedagogical support of teachers' professional development and activity.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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