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Informal Learning of Novice Teachers of Higher Education Institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service as a Factor in the Development of Their Teaching Competencies

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Abstract

Introduction: the article is devoted to the problem of informal learning in the context of development of teaching competencies of novice teachers of higher education institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service for their professional self-realization and pedagogical self-development. *Purpose:* to show the importance and identify capacities of informal learning to develop teaching competencies of novice teachers. *Methods:* theoretical analysis of literature, methods of comparison, classification, and generalization. *Results:* not only formal, but also informal education takes place throughout life. Informal learning guarantees the right of access to education for all novice teachers, is designed for any age and does not imply a continuous education structure. Novice teachers of universities of the Federal Penitentiary Service, who have legal or other, but not pedagogical education, have certain difficulties in teaching employees who have experience working in a departmental structure. The development of teaching competencies of novice teachers can be considered as the acquisition of new pedagogical skills and practical experience in the process of informal learning in the workplace, communication with more experienced colleagues, mentors, and managers. *Conclusions:* informal learning of novice teachers contributes to the formation of a professional attitude to pedagogical activity, increases self-assessment, improves awareness of pedagogical behavior and the specifics of students' behavior. In addition, in order to facilitate informal learning of novice teachers, it is important to provide both personal (self-awareness and desire to learn) and organizational contexts. Informal learning of novice teachers can improve teaching competencies.

Keywords: lifelong learning; informal learning; formal learning; novice teachers; teaching competencies; adult education.

5.8.1. General pedagogy, history of pedagogy and education.

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Introduction

In recent years, the scientific community has been rethinking the value of lifelong learning. This trend is taken into account all over the world when developing educational policies and mechanisms for its implementation. Lifelong learning is described in UNESCO resolutions as purposeful educational activities carried out on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies. This is no longer just one of the aspects of education and training; it should become a guiding principle for ensuring and participating in the entire continuum of learning contexts. Therefore, lifelong learning includes informal learning acquired on the basis of experience and, therefore, runs through the professional career of a novice teacher [1; 2, p. 5].

When developing teaching competencies of novice teachers of higher education institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FPS of Russia) for self-realization and pedagogical self-development, informal education has undoubted capacities.

Features of informal learning

Informal learning is considered additional, alternative to formal as part of the lifelong learning process [3]. Informal learning guarantees the right of access to education for all novice teachers, is designed for teachers of all ages and does not imply a continuous education structure: it can be short, low-intensity and is usually conducted in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars at the workplace [4]. Informal learning of novice teachers mainly leads to obtaining qualifications that are not recognized by the relevant state educational authorities as equivalent to formal qualifications, but there are no special courses for acquiring teaching competencies. It is

no coincidence that novice teachers of higher education institutions of the FPS of Russia, who have legal or other, but not pedagogical education, have certain difficulties in teaching employees who have experience in departmental structures.

To begin with, within the framework of the problem state, it is important to define a “novice teacher”. Age limits can be unlimited: this may be a middle-aged man who has recently been transferred from penal system bodies and started his/her teaching career, or recently graduated from the university. For some researchers, novice teachers are those who have been teaching in higher education institutions for less than four years, while others extend this period to 5–7 years. In our opinion, novice teachers are those having teaching experience in a departmental university of up to 7 years.

Professional competencies of a teacher

To organize informal learning and identify its key constructs, it is also important to understand what teaching competencies need to be formed in novice teachers of departmental universities of the FPS of Russia.

Traditionally, the professional profile of the teaching staff includes three main functions: teaching, research and administration. Focusing on the function of teaching, scientists have not yet developed a consensus on who is a “good teacher”. Nevertheless, the concept of higher education focused on learning and innovation cannot be understood without taking into account professional competencies of teachers. To do this, we propose a set of teaching competencies of novice teachers that determine their pedagogical skills (table).

Teaching competencies of novice teachers

| Teaching competencies | Indicators |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Proficiency | Knowledge of the discipline and its relationship with other disciplines |
| Interpersonal competencies | Interaction with students, motivation, trust, empathy and ethical obligations |
| Methodological competencies | Application of methodological strategies that are consistent with needs, context, and goals; assessment |
| Communication competencies | Establishing effective, adequate communication when contextualizing it in various learning situations |
| Learning planning and management | Development of the content of lessons |
| Assessment competencies | Evaluation of the educational process |
| Team work competencies | Cooperation in a group at the level of an educational organization, institute, and department |
| Learning | Guiding the learning process of students by promoting their autonomy |
| Innovation | Reflecting on one's own practice and taking initiatives to improve teaching |

So, the development of teaching competencies of novice teachers of departmental universities of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia is defined as a gradual evolution towards professionalism, which strengthens the educational function, accompanied by critical introspection. In addition, in the process of informal learning of novice teachers of departmental universities of the FPS of Russia, we include an organizational perspective and identify facilitators and barriers to professional development that are taken into account in the process of informal learning.

At the beginning of a teaching career, novice teachers are focused on themselves; they try to master the subject and overcome pedagogical uncertainty. Consequently, we consider development of teaching competencies of novice teachers as the acquisition of new pedagogical skills and practical experience in the process of informal learning in the workplace, informal communication with more experienced colleagues, mentors, and managers. Also, informal learning of novice teachers implies the absence of systematic control, learning does not correspond to the curriculum and is not limited to certain environments. We have observed that novice teachers, participating in team informal educational events, develop their teaching competencies more effectively.

The process of informal learning of novice teachers at a departmental university of the FPS of Russia is mainly focused on the teacher's participation in team and individual educational activities, such as practice and testing, as well as interaction and discussion of results with students and colleagues. So, an example of team learning activity is the observation of a novice teacher for more experienced colleagues in the process of teaching. Individual informal educational activity involves inclusion of novice teachers in online professional communities, cooperation and dialogues with colleagues.

Informal learning of novice teachers contributes to the formation of a professional attitude to pedagogical activity, increases self-esteem, improves awareness of pedagogical behavior and the specifics of students' behavior, develops new views on informal learning and its role in professional development. In addition, in order to facilitate the informal learning of novice teachers, it is important to provide both personal (self-awareness and desire to learn) and organizational contexts.

As part of the motivation of personal contexts, educational organizations of the FPS of Russia encourage teaching staff to develop competencies as they perform their pedagogical work. In fact, departmental universities are

striving to expand the expertise of their novice teachers and promote a new model of pedagogical profession in accordance with the current situation. As part of the development of organizational contexts, we use three main components to promote informal learning of novice teachers: research training (i.e. focusing novice teachers' attention on research and experiments), encouraging mistakes (i.e. encouraging them to make mistakes and learn from them) and emotional control (i.e. giving novice teachers the opportunity to manage their emotions). The feedback factor is also important, which stimulates the active search behavior of a novice teacher and his/her further informal learning.

Within the framework of informal learning, novice teachers can build various strategies for the development of teaching competencies based on their initial data: seek to expand their knowledge in the subject; improve competencies when interacting with students; pay attention to educational and methodological competencies and the specifics of the educational process.

Capacities of informal learning

So, we will list possibilities of informal learning for novice teachers to develop teaching competencies. The first one is that novice teachers are interested in learning in the most effective way possible, prefer to focus on key points and receive resources to expand their skills and abilities.

The second advantage is the possibility of training in an individual mode. Informal learning provides the opportunity and resources to take an active role in managing one's own learning to ensure achievement of goals.

The third advantage of informal learning is professional interaction of novice and experienced teachers on equal terms. Everyone contributes to the educational process.

The main advantage of informal learning in the development of teaching competencies is that novice teachers can independently look for learning opportunities. According to Cyril Houle, adult learners may be classified as being primarily goal-oriented, activity-oriented, or learning-oriented learners. Goal-oriented novice teachers strive to achieve a specific goal, activity-oriented novice teachers enjoy the learning

process, including social nature of many types of teaching experience, and learning-oriented ones has an innate desire to learn [5].

Subsequent researchers sought to expand and refine the list of S. Houle's motivations. So, Morstein and Smart (1974) developed motivational factors based on a scale of participation in education, for example, social relations – establishment of new acquaintances, social interaction; external expectations – novice teachers' necessity to study and master new knowledge; professional growth for career advancement; social security – desire to serve others and society; distraction/stimulation – hobby for someone; cognitive interest – genuine interest in learning for the sake of learning [6, pp. 52–54; 7].

Thus, our study expands understanding of the specifics of informal learning of novice teachers of departmental universities.

Specifics of adult education

The theoretical basis of informal learning of novice teachers is organized with regard that they will teach adult students and it is important for them to know the specifics of this category of students. Novice teachers can be often younger or the same age as their students.

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles was one of the first modern scientists to claim that adults learn differently than children. He popularized the term "andragogy" to describe adult-oriented teaching methods, as well as worked out an adult learning theory based on unique characteristics of adult learners. M. Knowles analyzed a list of unique characteristics applicable to adult learners, including the tendency of adults to self-study, adult preferences in purposeful, relevance-oriented and practical learning, as well as rich life experience and subsequent need for self-realization [8]. Adult learners establish connections with previous knowledge and experience, are able to correct misconceptions and focused on achieving goals, which can change over time depending on the needs at different stages of life and often vary from one adult learner to another.

Adult learners study what is most useful and important for them in their professional activities and comply with their own experience and refuse cramming. In cases where the relevance of certain information may not be obvious to

adult learners, an indication of how or why it is important, especially on a personal level, can help draw their attention to the learning process. Similarly, training programs with mandatory assignments or topics for study and control may dissatisfy some adult participants.

It is important for participants of the learning process to share examples from their own experience and communicate actively. Everybody's contribution to the learning process is appreciated; facilitators share information about their own connections with content.

It is important for novice teachers to take these arguments into account in teaching [9].

So, in the context of informal learning, target guidelines can vary greatly, so it is important for teachers to correctly interpret their own unique goals and understand capacities of informal learning in the development of teaching competencies.

Therefore, it is important to organize the process of informal learning of novice teachers taking into account the specifics of adult education and create a learning environment that helps to minimize the fear of failure, because adults tend to avoid situations in which they may fail. However, it is necessary to explain to novice teachers that making mistakes is part of learning. Experienced teachers can help novice teachers to moderate discussions so that participants whose views or beliefs dif-

fer from ideas of their colleagues still feel part of the group. Since novice teachers learn in different ways and at different speeds, it is important that they be attentive to the differences between students.

Conclusion

In recent years, the interest of teaching staff of educational organizations of the FPS of Russia in high-quality teaching has significantly increased, so novice teachers are encouraged to continuous professional development. There is no doubt that novice teachers are offered options for formal learning and advanced training, but they are still voluntary and, therefore, cover only a small percentage of teachers. Unlike the formal learning format, informal learning of novice teachers takes place during daily pedagogical practice at the workplace, which provides significantly greater opportunities for the development of teaching competencies.

Thus, the presented evidence confirms the stance that the acquisition of teaching competencies by novice teachers occurs more effectively in the process of informal learning, since the content of such learning is more closely related to individual needs of a novice teacher, is self-managed and self-regulated, i.e. learning takes place at its own individual pace, based on the time and cognitive resources of the individual.

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