Russian
Psychological
Society

Lomonosov
Moscow State
University

The modern Russian teacher: Studying awareness with the use of the semi-structured interview

Leonid S. Ilyushin*, Anastasia A. Azbel

Department of Continuous Philological Education and Educational Management, St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia

* Corresponding author. E-mail: leonidil62@mail.ru

This research is based on the ideas of Humanistic-Existential Psychology, a positive approach to personal growth, and modern educational concepts concerning the dynamics of professional and social identity in the stratum of secondary and primary school teachers. The goal of the study is to get an objective picture of the professional and personal changes among Russian teachers under the conditions of school modernization. We offer a detailed model of the semi-structured interview with modern teachers, in combination with observation. The interview consists of 63 questions divided into 9 topics, and deals with issues related to what their professional activities mean to the teachers; the teachers' evaluation of professional dynamics; their attitude toward various aspects of professional life; and their general world outlook and values. We also briefly describe a pre-interview "warm-up" strategy. This stage of the research resulted in the successful pilot use of the research methodology, and data sufficient to evaluate the initial trends of the analysis of all the data. The study's main conclusions concern the observation technique, which offers a significant increase in the potential of the interview method, mainly through providing the ability to interpret non-verbal reactions, the level of openness, and the teacher's trust in the dialogue. Moreover, we must note that, when we asked teachers to answer complicated written questions, their answers, judgments, and arguments varied greatly, regardless of their professional and personal characteristics (employment history, qualification category, the subject they teach, type of school, etc.)

Keywords: awareness, personal meaning of professional activities, semi-structured interview, modern Russian teacher

Introduction

Sociocultural shifts in the modern Russian school environment are a matter of great interest due to the deeply traditional nature of education in society. The phenomenon of modern childhood (including school years) has been the topic of quite a few profound studies (Asmolov, 2008; Feldshtein,1998; Elliott, Hufton, Ilyushin,

& Willis, 2005), whereas the personality of a teacher has been primarily considered from the perspective of determining his or her attitude toward educational reforms and innovations (Kazakova, 2013), and the degree of the teacher's' personality development (Trapicina, 2010; Shechovcova, 2006; Elliott, 1993; Bordovskaya, 2016; Shadrikov, 2012). We consider such a "framework" of research to be excessively limited, and even biased due to its being requested by state authorities. As a result, our approach is derived from the need for a wider scope of research on the modern Russian teacher's personality.

We put forward a number of the hypotheses which define the concept of our research, to justify this position. They exist on two different "planes":

I. Relating to the study's methodology:

- The level of a teacher's internal consistency is revealed through the combination of verbal and non-verbal activity in the course of the semi-structured interview;
- We suspect a lack of positive thinking among teachers, regardless of their professional or personal characteristics;

II. Relating to new academic knowledge:

- We may observe a "deficit of meaning" about teaching in the mind of modern teachers;
- The depth of the modern teacher's professional reflection is significantly limited since there is no demand for it;
- The teacher's attitude toward opposites (self-confidence vs. self-consciousness, freedom vs. fear, harmony vs. crisis) is determined by the system of professional priorities.

Theoretical framework

In the late 1980s, psychologists paid less attention to standards and pathologies, such as whether teachers are well-adjusted or ill-adjusted, or rational or irrational. Gordeeva (2007) proves that a pessimistic attributional style is a cognitive risk factor for depression; consequently, it leads to lower personal efficacy in life as a whole.

However, thanks to such thinkers and psychologists of the 20th century as Victor Frankl (2006), Bruno Bettelheim (1960), and Anne Frank (1995), scientists began to analyze the behavior patterns which allowed people to survive in circumstances that were directly hostile to human life. That was when a new era of psychological research—i.e., research identifying psychologically stable or well-balanced people—started (Chiksentmihaiyi, 1997; Seligman, 2006; Sheldon, 2011; Haidt, 2006; Boniwell, 2009; Leontiev, 2012; Aleksandrova, 2011).

The role of positive and constructive thinking in achieving subjective well-being is well proven, and has become the basis for cognitive psychotherapy. The key mechanisms of self-development and therapy are the following: **becoming aware** of a particular problem or life circumstances; **taking responsibility** for the actions required to overcome this problem; and achieving it with the help of **regular reflection (self-awareness)** in relation to one's personality at a particular moment. It

is evident that success in human activities is largely due to positive thinking, and self-awareness as one of its mechanisms.

Another important point is that modern neurobiology clearly defines mechanisms of child personality formation through mirror neurons. Children learn about the world at large, their country, school, and people around them using information, or stimulus, from the outside (Bauer, 2009). We can assume with a high degree of certainty that if pessimism and negativity are communicated to a child's mind, the child's brain will reflect the same characteristics, communicate negative expectations, and show a high level of aggression, and an external locus of control. However, if positive and constructive attitudes are communicated to a child's mind, this information is a signal for normal and safe development; a child's self-esteem and motivation become higher, and an internal locus of control is formed (Gordeeva et al., 2010; Kahneman, 2000).

The teacher's role is to officially keep and communicate cultural and historical knowledge, a general world outlook, and a system of values (Kazakova, 2013). Consequently, it is essential to define the types of thinking that prevail in the community of adult professionals (teachers). Are there any new professional circumstances, challenges and demands surrounding modern teachers? What do teachers communicate to their students, apart from the subjects they teach? It is our intention to find answers to these complicated questions in the course of our study.

Purpose of the study. Main hypotheses

The purpose of our study is to get an objective picture of professional and personal changes among Russian teachers under the conditions of the modernization of education.

In order to achieve our goals and to find answers to our questions, we have chosen a method involving both interviews and direct observation. Thus two types of information can be obtained. First, there is an opportunity to directly observe a teacher's behavior during the interview. The second important function of the interview is to receive direct answers about the teacher's professional life, as a person who is transmitting a mass-scale cultural code. Our interview not only focuses on what is happening with particular teachers in their school at present; teachers are also interviewed on how they perceive developments in the education system as a whole, and are asked to give their views about the changes they observe as immediate and active participants in the educational system.

Our reason for not using both questionnaires and surveys is the following: When we receive written answers, we cannot be sure that respondents have been completely sincere. The use of questionnaires may lead to the wrong conclusions if important information has not been obtained, or if the data obtained has been inadequately or incorrectly interpreted.

Method

The principal method we used was a semi-structured interview. The interviewing process comprised four stages:

1. Preparation
2. Establishing contact and removing psychological tension
3.   Interview process per se
4.   Reflection

The total number of school teachers interviewed in the study was 97, who came from 26 schools located in the St. Petersburg metropolitan area, and in the rural or small state regions of Leningradskaya oblast, Yamal, and Petrozavodsk. It would still be premature to talk about deep data analysis; however, a number of significant trends have already emerged. At the moment we do not consider the teacher's location an independent variable. The methodological reason for that is that all those interviewed work according to the same Federal educational standards. We also take into account that their average salary is the same within the region.

Stage 1: *The preparation stage is used for research sampling*

At this stage we approach a school administration or teachers who may be interested in taking part in our research, and invite them to discuss the problems of modern education, and the role of the teacher's personality in the educational system. We also explain that the purpose of this research is to create a portrait of a modern school teacher. Teachers are asked to share their experience and expertise in the system in which they work. We also consider it very important to inform the school administration that no specific school will be mentioned in the report on the study, and that our goal is to carry out research, but not to check, test, certify, or accredit their school. This clarification is necessary, because when the school principal or deputy head-teacher is approached by two academics who ask them to assist in organizing research, there frequently is a lack of trust, or even fear. Taking part in the research and joining the sample are voluntary, and maximum openness is expected from the interviewees. In addition, the interviewers must show the highest degree of research ethics and friendliness.

At this stage of our study we faced certain problems. For example, when we asked the head-teachers to help us with sampling, they tended to invite "the best" teachers to take part in the interviews. Once we realized this, we began to be more specific in our requests and asked the head-teacher to let us interview the "average" teacher in the school — anyone who was available for an 80-minute interview and was willing to take part in a conversation.

Stage 2: *The process of establishing contact and removing psychological tension*

We conducted most of the interviews either during the school year when schools are busy and teachers are giving lessons, or on holiday, when preparations for a new school term are under way. In many cases it was rather difficult for teachers to immediately start answering profound questions about the meaning of their teaching activities. Therefore, it was very important for us to refocus their attention and the flow of their thoughts away from worrying about their work (e.g. filling out the gradebook, meeting students, answering parents' questions, etc.) to their inner feel-

ings about themselves and what they do (what they think about themselves, what professional plans they have, how they feel, etc.).

That is why we use the projective method called "Life Journey" (Solomin, 2006). The implementation of this method has proven that it may be effective not only in preparing the minds of respondents for deep conversation, but also as a diagnostic tool. The clarity of our method allows respondents to concentrate on their inner feelings, while its metaphorical nature helps them to overcome natural tension at the beginning of the interview; moreover, further answers could be elicited on the basis of this metaphorical picture of personal intentions and feelings. With the help of this method, teachers can overcome the difficulty of verbalizing their attitude to some complicated questions, and get a chance to express their feelings and thoughts freely and safely. Our method allows researchers to see the teachers' emotional condition, some features of their temperaments, their perceptions of their life journeys and their attitude to them, and the predominance, or absence, of professional and personal goals.

Our method consists of two parts:

1. The respondent draws a picture of his or her life. It takes 5-7 minutes.
2. One of us, who is a psychologist, discusses this drawing with the teacher, then we ask the respondent some questions about the drawing. It takes approximately 3-5 minutes.

Stage 3: Interview process per se

Before the interview starts, we introduce ourselves and present the research and the time limits (approximately 70 minutes), so that the teacher can do some planning in terms of time and dialogue involvement.

The introduction is generally as follows:

"This interview is part of academic research aimed at studying the personality of the modern Russian teacher. There can be no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in this interview; we only hope that your answers will be sincere and understandable. You do not have to answer the questions you do not wish to answer. The interview consists of 9 sections, and at the end of each section you are welcome to add any other opinion or statement, or anything you believe is important, to what you have already said.

"The interview will be recorded and later transcribed as text. Any subsequent quoting of your interview will be anonymous, and we are prepared to give you a printed copy of your interview text. The whole interview will take about an hour, maybe a little longer. Thank you for agreeing to take part in our research.

"Before we start asking questions, we would like you to relax a little and draw a picture so that you can get emotionally tuned for the interview. The method we use is called 'My Life Journey.' Your drawing skills are not really important; you may draw abstract images or diagrams. Just think about yourself and your inner world under your life circumstances. You will hear the instructions twice. Then you will have some time to think about yourself and draw for about 5-7 minutes. Is that OK? Relax, make yourself comfortable. You can close your eyes."

Then we read the instructions with accentuated pauses:

"A traveler was walking down the road called 'Life'. The road took him to a crossroads. The traveler stopped, looked around, and wondered which way to take. (Pause).

"Imagine you are that traveler. (Pause). What are you thinking about? (Pause) What are you feeling?

"There is a blank sheet of paper in front of you. Take a pencil and draw your past history, your current position, and options for your future life. (Pause)

"Use your memories and emotions, fantasies and dreams. Where do you want to go? (Pause)

"What are you going to take with you on your journey?

"What do you think you will face on your way? (Pause)

"What are you enjoying as you go?

"What are you going to learn?"

We use A4 paper for drawing (210×297 mm). We do not rush the respondents, and they usually let us know when they have finished.

We modified Solomin's original method called "My Life Journey" in two ways. First, the question "What are you enjoying as you go" has been added. This change is essential because it creates a positive approach to further conversation. The second modification deals with encouragement. According to the original method, it was important for the interviewee to use a black graphite pencil or ball-point pen, so that we could evaluate the pressure and nature of lines drawn. However, we offered the respondents the use of 12 colored pencils, thus emphasizing that there is a free choice of drawing techniques.

Therefore, in addition to verbal answers, we get additional diagnostic information:

1. Do teachers choose to use various colors?
2. Latent period (i.e. the time between finishing listening to the instructions and starting to draw; agreeing to listen to the instructions a second time).
3. The respondents' first verbal or non-verbal reaction to their drawing immediately after it has been completed.
4. Refusing to do the task.
5. Motor tension unrelated to the drawing.

Principles of interpreting observation

As we didn't use this method in the interest of a client, there were no customer-oriented or clarification questions in the end. However, we interpreted certain facts in accordance with I.L. Solomin's test cards. Solomin does not take into account the first or the third criterion listed in the Table 1; therefore, we use our own diagnostic experience.

Principles used in discussing the results of the drawing, and establishing contact

We discussed the results using visual metaphors with the principle of analogy between the drawing and Solomin's "Life Journey" method (Solomin, 2006). In other

Table 1. Evaluation criteria for teachers' drawings

Observation criteria	Criterion value	Possible reasons	Possible clarifications by researchers
1. Do teachers choose to use various colors?	The drawing uses various colors	1. The importance of personal involvement in the research. 2. Creative nature of a respondent. 3. Freedom of self-expression, accepting oneself. 4. Desire to use all opportunities.	Do you always draw pictures using different colors?
	The drawing is mono-chromatic	1. Non-involvement, pessimism. 2. No visible opportunities. 3. The author intentionally used one color in the drawing	We usually leave it without comment, in order to avoid triggering defense mechanisms.
2. Latent period (i.e. the time between finishing listening to the instructions and starting to draw; agreeing to listen to the instructions a second time).	Starting the work quickly. Respondents do not listen to the end of the instructions.	1. Impulsiveness, emotionality, involvement. 2. Openness towards interviewers. 3. Desire to finish quickly. 4. Inner tension removal.	We usually leave it without comment, if there is no need to establish contact
	Agreeing to listen to the instructions a second time.	1. No tension. 2. Openness to one's feelings. 3. Respondents did not understand the instructions, something distracted them.	
3. Respondents' first verbal or non-verbal reaction to their drawing immediately after it has been completed.	Positive	1. Self-acceptance. 2. Readiness for discussion. 3. Openness.	We usually leave it without comment, in order to avoid triggering defense mechanisms.
	Neutral	1. No tension. 2. Detachment.	
	Negative	1. Non-acceptance of oneself. 2. Non-acceptance of the interview situation.	
4. Refusing to do the task.	Refusal is available	1. Emotional shock. 2. Distrust of the interviewers. 3. Perfectionism and being afraid of looking ridiculous.	Is there anything that prevents you from drawing anything? A conversation removing psychological tension. Reiterating the introduction concerning non-judgment and confidentiality.
5. Motor tension unrelated to the drawing	Body tremor. Biting lips. The skin color changes	1. Emotional tension. 2. Specific physiological features.	Are you all right? Do you feel comfortable?

words, a drawing of one's life journey represents a metaphoric model of the respondent's actual life journey. During the conversation, we tried to match the drawing and the teacher's life. Therefore, if we can determine the respondent's attitude to certain details of the drawing, we can also assume that his or her attitude toward similar phenomena in real life is the same.

The respondents we interviewed were encouraged to talk about themselves and their feelings. This method is used for the following purposes:

1. Understanding the respondent's life goals and aspirations, and the most important things in his/her life.
2. The respondent's attitude to his/her life: Are there problems that cannot be solved; Is there a critical condition or not?
3. Identifying resource opportunities for the subject's "ego."

After the drawing has been completed, the conversation goes on to complete the metaphor construction. The following questions are asked:

1. Could you tell us where you are in this picture? What are you doing? Where are you going? What is there?
2. If your drawing were exhibited at an art gallery, what name would you give to it?
3. Which part of the journey is the happiest for you (the traveler)? What is happening there? What is the reason for that?

The metaphor construction is complete once we have understood the general meaning of the picture, and helped the teacher relax and prepare to act their role in the interview. After that, we start by asking the respondent questions about his/her professional biography.

The general organization of the interview gives certain freedom to the respondents in choosing the topic sequence (sections with questions). The only exception is the "Professional Biography" section, which contains short formal questions about their education, employment history, workload, etc. This section always comes first in the interview. Then we place the remaining eight sections at random on the table in front of the teacher. The teacher can see the names of the sections, but has no idea what sort of questions they contain, because they are printed on the other side. We offer the teacher the opportunity to silently read the names of all the blocks and choose one to start the "verbal" part of the interview. After that, the interviewer takes a corresponding sheet of paper and starts a dialogue with the teacher using the questions listed there. The respondent does not know the sequence of questions inside the section or the number of questions. Once the conversation on the subject of that section is over, the interviewer proceeds with another section chosen by the teacher, and so on.

In our view, this scenario provides several important opportunities for both conducting the interview and interpreting data. First, teachers turn out to be more active interlocutors when they are free to choose the sequence of the topics (sections). Second, after finishing the previous section, teachers have time to decide what they want to talk about at that particular moment. A short pause helps remove any possible emotional tension that may have appeared after the previous ques-

tions. Third, at the later deciphering stage, it is possible to build a priority frequency diagram reflecting the teachers' choice of sections, and obtain a whole range of additional data.

We can observe teachers' awareness of their positions. In addition, we reveal their degree of positive thinking and their general personal emotional background. Below is a listing of what we observed through noting non-verbal expressions, the speed of establishing contact with interviewers, emotional reactions, and indirect comments:

1. Friendliness and trust.
2. Spontaneity and sincerity.
3. Openness in communication.
4. A contrary attitude.
5. The general emotional background of the conversation.

Structure and content of the interview, with comments

The structure of the interview is as follows: there are 9 sections and 64 questions. Each section contains between 3 and 10 questions.

Section 1: *Professional biography*

The Professional Biography section concerns biographical data. We asked teachers typical questions about their level and field of education, work experience, special skills, and free time activities. As a result, we often discovered respondents' attitude toward their past; for example, when they are asked about their school years, or previous work experience outside the education system. Acquiring biographical data is also one of the most efficient ways of clustering and identifying sub-groups who share a common pattern of the major life events.

Interview questions:

1. What subject do you teach?
2. What are your qualifications?
3. What is your date of birth?
4. How long have you been teaching?
5. What is your "teaching category" (High, 1, 2, 3)?
6. What is your workload as a teacher, and what are your additional duties at school (including private lessons, if any)?

Section 2: *Meaning of teaching*

We connected most questions in this section with values and goal setting. However, we intentionally avoided asking teachers "What is the purpose of teaching your subject?," etc., because the whole concept of "purpose" in the modern teacher's mind is evidently linked with a methodology that is interpreted in a very formal way. In other words, we did not encourage teachers to quote methodological guidelines on their subjects. Instead we used the category of "meaning" as something that requires thinking spontaneously and holistically, and solving a rather complicated professional task. Contrasting "the meaning of work" with "its meaningless part," and asking questions 2, 4, 5 & 9 were essential so that we could determine how profoundly teachers understood what they are working for, and how they saw their mission as the core of the educational system. On the whole, the questions in

this section allowed us to get a teacher's opinion on his/her own role in the educational process.

Interview questions:

1. What is the most important meaning of your work?
2. In your opinion, does the meaning of work, or a teacher's mission, depend on the subject they teach?
3. Which part of your work could you call "meaningless?" Please give an example.
4. Could you give a concise definition of the primary meaning of teaching your subject at school? What exactly do you teach?
5. Do you agree that it is crucial to only teach things of practical use in life?
6. In your opinion, what is the main difference between an educated and uneducated person?
7. Do you agree that in the era of the Internet, it is possible to learn everything there?
8. Why do you think children do not want to study and become educated people?
9. Everyone changes the world through their work. How are you changing the world with the help of your work?

Section 3: *Attitude toward work*

On the one hand, the questions in this section assume that the present ("now") is under discussion; on the other hand, they reveal more "extended" categories of the teachers' attitude toward their work. Question No. 2 is not a "control" question for question No. 1; however, it is generally possible to get an important comment about a teacher's work process. We formulated eight questions out of ten from a "positive frame of mind" toward work; they enabled the researchers to listen to respondents when the latter were in a state of comfortable positive reminiscence, or thinking about what they must do. The ninth question is the only one that contains a problematic and, possibly, even negative judgment. As shown by pilot interviews, the answer to this question often reveals not just a teacher's negative assessment of his/her participation in the educational process, but on a wider scale, a teacher's attitude toward the situation where, for instance, he or she is unable to fulfill his/her mission.

Interview questions:

1. Do you generally like your work?
2. Are you enjoying it at this point in your life, for example, this month?
3. What do you most like about your work as a teacher?
4. What do you most like doing as a teacher?
5. What are you really good at?
6. Have today's lessons made you happy?
7. What exactly made you happy about today's lessons?
8. Could you tell us about something that you enjoyed about them in particular?
9. What are you most worried about in your work?
10. Are you an emotional person? What sort of emotions (positive or negative ones) do you most often experience at school?

Section 4: *Emotional state, mood, self-confidence, depression/optimism*

This set of questions lets us define several crucial aspects of a teacher's personal characteristics, such as a) his/her intensity limits for emotionally important events; b) attitude toward social optimism, which is one of the key values of a teacher; and c) self-evaluation in terms of professional mastery and occupational burnout. Question No. 4 is comprised of two parts so that we can get a more sincere answer to the second question, as teachers can use their memories to answer the first question, and then compare their answers to both questions. Finally, question No. 6 is very important for observing the psychology of the respondents during the interview, and can also be compared with the answer to the question "In your opinion, what is the most important thing in life?" in one of the other sections.

Interview questions:

1. What has made you really happy today?
2. What has upset you?
3. Do you think that social optimism is a necessary professional quality for a teacher?
4. Imagine that teaching mastery could be evaluated on the 1-100 scale. Have you ever met teachers whose score would be over 90? What is your self-assessment on that scale?
5. What is "occupational burnout" in teaching, and are you afraid of suffering from it?
6. Are you a happy person?

Section 5: *World outlook and system of values*

It may seem that the questions in this section hardly relate to each other; however, our pilot interviews confirmed the hypothesis that respondents perceive them as a whole because all the questions (except No. 6) are outside the scope of school life, and highlight the social role and public status of a teacher. Questions No. 1 and 2 both contain the word "life," and their combination as a sequence provides us with a good opportunity to define a teacher's main values in life by his/her chosen method for achieving it. The second question is partly provocative, as it contains an obvious imperative and sounds almost like an advertising slogan. The way teachers analyze this slogan is valuable because of their articulated examples, and it provides an opportunity to clearly define the limits of respondents' active attitude toward life.

Interview questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the most important thing in life?
2. How do you feel about the slogan "Take everything from life!"
3. Do you see the future of this country and of the world in an optimistic or pessimistic way?
4. How much do you think we can trust mass media?
5. In your view, what is the major problem of modern Russian society?
6. How would you compare children and teenagers of today with children and teenagers at the time of your own childhood?

Section 6: *Innovations in education (Unified State Exams, Federal State Education Standards, electronic diary, portfolio, research work, etc.)*

Even though concrete examples of "innovations" are given on the front side of the card in explanatory notes to the questions, there is very little reference to these in the questions themselves. Our objective was to let the teachers get the gist of the questions and then discuss the principal categories (such as changes in education, quality of education, motivation for further studies, etc.), rather than the practice of introducing innovations as such. Questions No. 2, 3, 6, & 7 are clearly comparative, which encourages teachers to give answers in the form of an expert opinion with possible clarification or comment. Question No. 4 is a "control" question to check how teachers understand the FSES (Federal State Educational Standard) methodology. The main reason why question No. 7 is interesting is that it makes teachers think about all the students they teach and assess their intention to continue education at university. For that, we expected teachers to use their direct observation of their students' intellectual achievements and independence.

Interview questions:
1. How do you feel about the changes in Russian education on the whole? Do they make you happy or sad?
2. Do you believe that the current educational standards are better than those you used in your work earlier?
3. Do you think that teaching has improved in comparison with your time in school?
4. How would you define the idea of a competency-based approach without using the word "competency?"
5. What is your opinion of introducing electronic diaries into the schools?
6. Russian schoolchildren (middle-school level) show rather low results at PISA (the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment) tests. What is the reason for that?
7. How do you feel about the fact that most graduates are willing to become university students? What percentage of your students do you think should go to university?
8. Should the school try to teach those students who do not want to study?
9. What, in your opinion, is the percentage of gifted children among your students?

Section 7: *Changes and development in the work process*

The questions in this section are extremely interesting because almost every question provides respondents with an opportunity to give an extended answer including examples, e.g. what sort of career development training they would like to have and why they could possibly resign. The answer to question No. 2 seems obvious at first glance; however, this question is not merely about defining the role of practical pedagogy in the framework of mastery. In their answers teachers may refer to something they learned in their work.

Interview questions:
1. How long have you been working as a teacher? How have you changed over the time (in terms of personality, self-esteem, or attitude to people)?

2. If you compare the pedagogical knowledge you received at university with the knowledge you received at work, which seems to be more significant?

3. Do you agree that mastery of pedagogy depends very much on teaching experience?

4. If you had a free choice of high-quality professional training courses (workshops, master classes, etc.), which would you like to sign up for right now?

5. Has your work in education (in terms of content, organization, priorities, etc.) changed much since you started this career? What are the major changes, and how would you evaluate them?

6. Have you ever wanted to leave your work as an educator? What was the reason for that?

7. How do you assess your social status as a teacher? Do you have to defend your social status in front of your acquaintances?

Section 8: *Health. Healthy lifestyle. Physical shape*

This section, in combination with the "Free time" section, analyzes teachers' lifestyles and their attitudes toward self-development outside the scope of their professional activities. The questions in this section are easily understood by respondents, because no assessment is required here, and the questions deal with everyday life. Using a second confirming question helps respondents concentrate on their physical state, which is the main topic of the section.

Interview questions:
1. Do you do any physical exercise (sports, the gym, etc.)? How often?
2. Do you have a healthy lifestyle? How would you illustrate that?
3. How tired do you usually feel by weekends/ by the end of school year?

Section 9: *Free time. Hobbies. Recent shining examples (cinema, theater, books, travel)*

We start this section with a very general question; its main purpose is to determine how teachers understand "professional skills and knowledge": Is it as competency in their academic sphere, or as teaching skills (i.e. ability to interact with children and understand age-specific characteristics)? This section can help reveal teachers' interests in some other types of knowledge and provide us with some information about the scope of their cultural code. Questions No. 2-6 are intended to determine the respondents' aesthetic and communicative preferences, whereas question No. 4 provides us with information about the frequency of cultural events in the respondents' lives.

Interview questions:
1. Do your professional skills and knowledge help you in your "out-of-school" life? How? (Is a teacher an expert on children?)
2. Do you have a free time hobby?
3. What do you most like doing in your free time, on holiday, or on weekends?
4. Please name a book, film, or theater performance which really impressed you recently.
5. Do you have favorite TV programs? Which ones?
6. How much time (approximately) a day/ a week do you surf the Internet in general, and use social networks in particular?

Stage 4. Reflection after the interview

In the concluding stage we aimed to help the teachers achieve a sense of balance after a profound, challenging, or emotionally charged conversation. We ask respondents typical questions which would allow them to reflect on the interview and to view it as complete.

Reflection questions:
1. How do you feel after the interview?
2. Have you gotten any new ideas or feelings about your work during the interview?
3. Are there any questions we did not ask you but you would like to answer?

Thank you for your candid answers.

Results and conclusion

1. The technique we developed proved its efficacy both in terms of revealing the perception of the interview and the observations of the teacher-respondents, as well as with data interpretation. Teachers quite easily assumed the role of respondents, and largely stayed involved in the dialogue during the whole interview.

The wording of the fixed questions was clear, and did not require additional clarification, while the answers to the clarifying questions emerging in the logic of the dialogue showed the teachers' interest in disclosing their views. There were no questions that teachers refused to answer. The self-selection of priority clusters by the respondents, in general, increased their emotional involvement, and occasionally allowed us to identify their level of excitement and obtain additional spontaneous comments on the subject under discussion.

No direct correlation between the teachers' ages (work experience) and the degree of confidence in responding to the questions was found. Moreover, 8 out of 10 young professionals surveyed easily got involved in the conversation, and responded to a series of clarifying questions with no agitation or anxiety, unlike a very substantial percentage of the experienced teachers.

2. The analysis of the dynamics of the teachers' choice of priority clusters showed their desire to "to set aside" the theme of innovations in education (including the Federal State Educational Standard) until the end of the interview, which demonstrated a certain clouding effect (emotional distance) on this topic. By itself the free choice of priority blocks, of course, motivated the vast majority of teachers to engage in live, non-formalized conversation. At the same time, the observation of the behavior of the respondents during the interview showed that many teachers experience difficulties structuring their speech, planning the pace of the conversation, and controlling their repetitions and deviations from the main topic of the block, or perspectives on a particular issue.

Apparently, this can be interpreted as showing an insufficient level of communicative competence by teachers in the context of dialogue on a self-significant topic dealing with deeply-held values, rather than superficial functional ones.

3. The category of "meaninglessness" in the teacher's work, referred to in a number of questions, was recognized by the respondents directly; they willingly and quickly listed a number of issues, mainly in the context of control and bureau-

cracy. However, the opposite category of "meanings in teaching activities" often caused them difficulties in formulating responses and transferring these meanings. Some teachers sincerely admitted that this was the first time they thought about this question.

We registered approximately the same level of difficulty in getting answers when a teacher was invited to briefly reveal the essence of a "competent approach," while avoiding the use of the word "competence." In general, such questions have revealed the obvious aspiration of teachers to separate their own professional practices from the officially declared goals, objectives, etc. in the relevant documents.

4. Methods of monitoring conducted by the second researcher during the interview can significantly expand the information field of the dialogue, primarily through "reading" non-verbal reactions, and the degree of openness and trust in the dialogue. Indicative was the response to the specific question on "happiness:" When answering the question *"Are you a happy person?"* positively, respondents broadcasted a discrepancy between verbal and non-verbal reactions. Hypotheses relating to this and several other issues will undoubtedly be analyzed in future.

Observations of the teachers' behavior during the interview showed that, while they were on the whole reluctant during the conversation, they exhibited a number of common strategies of verbal behavior that can be considered professionally-determined, namely:

- Inconsistency in the arguments on a number of items relating to the goals and values of the teaching profession — in particular, the development of students' interest in learning as such, focus on the "strong" students, on the dialogue with parents, etc. Apparently, it is possible to ascertain the existence of internal conflict along the line of "I am professional" vs. "I am a personality" with the significant proportion of the respondents.
- An obvious emotional "barrier" in the discussion of the categories of the "past-present of "Russian education" with experienced teachers, coupled perhaps with profound changes in the way of pedagogical work has been evolving in the past few years;
- The quite consistent prevalence of criticism of the interview questions compared to the positive statements;
- A change (increase) in the level of trust and frankness in answering questions from the first to the next interview blocks as a reaction to the supportive remarks of the interviewer's responses in most cases. However, the respondents simultaneously experienced obvious difficulty in answering further clarifying questions, i.e.: "Why do you think...?", "Do you think this situation is right/wrong?," etc.;
- A significant number of teachers showed skepticism about changes (trends) in domestic educational development, as manifested in emotional remarks and non-verbal reactions to relevant questions.
- A common model of the respondents' verbal behavior was the one in which the teacher was constantly looking for support (approval, including non-verbal) in respect to certain judgments they expressed;

- Presumably, the level of professionalism in their own teaching is underestimated by a large number of teachers, and that creates a paradox as against their accurate and succinct responses on questions related to the meaning of educational activities and the teachers' own position ;
- There was a well-defined division of teachers into two groups according to the degree of confidence in answering questions about personal meaning, difficulties, crises, and doubt. Young teachers (work experience under 5 years) were much more open and trusting in discussion of the issues critically affecting their reputation. By contrast, teachers with experience provided details describing the "external circumstances" of professional activity, but were rather closed and reticent with regard to their personal experiences.

Against this background, particularly striking are the exceptions – i.e., some very experienced teachers expressed a very high level of reflection and degree of confidence with interviewers they didn't know.

5. Describing the dynamics of the professional and personal changes among Russian teachers over the last two years, we should conclude that a certain decrease in the overall level of teachers' anxiety is related to the implementation of the Federal State Educational Standard to the whole school system (not only for elementary school). However, teachers also articulated their strong emotional objection to the USE (Unified State Exam). This can be explained by several facts.

First, the quality of a teacher's work is primarily externally assessed by their students' exam performance in 4th, 9th, and 11th grades. At the same time, this assessment itself doesn't include the initial academic level of the student when he/she comes to the teacher. In other words, the dynamics of the student's cognitive and personal skills are almost ignored in the assessment of the quality of the teacher's work.

Second, the modern Russian teacher constantly faces both a personal and professional choice when working with his/her class: Is it more important to teach the subject, or to do the "exam coaching?"

Third and finally, the modern secondary school Russian teacher very often faces the situation where the textbooks' content doesn't fully correspond to the requirements of the Unified State Exam. This may turn into even more dramatic situation, when the teacher's personal values and beliefs don't coincide with the ideas and social practices they have to teach in the humanities.

6. In the teachers' responses to the complex questions regarding the meaning of their work, there was a significant variance in the quality of answers, value judgments, and arguments — their depth, fullness, and emotional engagement — and yet, the variance did not appear related to any specific professional and personal characteristics (work experience, category, subject and type of school, etc.)

Acknowledgements

References

Aleksandrova, L. A. (2011). Subektivnaya vitalnost kak sostavlyayushchaya lichnostnogo potenciala [Subjective vitality as an aspect of personality potential]. In D.A. Leontyev (Ed.), *Lichnostnyj potencial*: *struktura* i *diagnostic [Personality potential: Structure and assessment]*. (pp. 382–440). Moscow: Smysl.

Asmolov, A. (2008). Systemno-deyatelnostnii podhod k postroeniu obrazovatelnih standartov [Systemic-activity approach to development of educational standards]. *Obrazovatelnaya praktika [Educational practice], 2*, 17–18.

Bauer, J. (2006). *Warum ich fühle, was du fühlst: intuitive Kommunikation und das Geheimnis der Spiegelneurone*. Hoffmann and Campe.

Bettelheim, B. (1960). *The informed heart*: *Autonomy in* a *mass age*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.

Boniwell, I. (2009). Perspectives on time. In S. Lopez (Ed.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed). (pp. 295–302). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187243.013.0027

Bordovskaya, N. V. (2016). *Dialektika pedagogicheskogo issledovaniya. Monographiya* [Dialectics of a pedagogical research. Monograph]. Moscow: KNORUS.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

Elliott, J. G., Hufton, N. R., Ilyushin, L., & Willis, W. (2005). *Motivation, engagement and educational performance: International perspectives on the contexts for learning*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. doi: 10.1057/9780230509795

Elliott, J. (Ed.). (1993). *Reconstructing Teacher Education*. Falmer Press: London.

Feldshtein, D. I. (1989). *Psihologiya razvitiya lichnosti v ontogeneze* [Psychology of personality development in ontogeny]. Moscow: Pedagogika.

Frankl, V. (2006). *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York, Beacon Press.

Frank, A. (1995). *Anne Frank. The diary f* a *young girl*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Gordeeva, T., Osin, E., & Sheviakova, V. (2007). Diagnostika optimisma kak stilya obyasneniya uspekhov y neudach. Oprosnik STOUN [Diagnostics of optimism as the style of successes and failures. STOUN questionnaire]. *Obshesvenniye nauki y sovremennost [Contemporary Social Studies], 4,* 105–116.

Gordeeva, T. O., & Osin, E. N. (2010). Positivnoye mishleniye kak faktor uchebnikh dostizheniy starsheklassnikov [Positive thinking as a factor of academic achievements of high school students]. *Voprosy psikhologii [Issues in Psychology], 1,* 24–33.

Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. New York: Basic Books.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (2000). *Choices, values and frames*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kazakova, E. I. (2013). Razvivayushhij potencial shkoly: opyty nelinejnogo proektirovaniya. *Novoe v psixologo-pedagogicheskix issledovaniyax, 2,* 37–50.

Leontiev, D. (2012). Pozitivnaja psihologija: povestka dnja novogo stoletija [Positive psychology: An agenda for the new century]. *Psihologija. Zhurnal Vysshej shkoly jekonomiki [Psychology. Journal of the Higher School of Economics]*, *9*(4), 36–58.

Shadrikov, V. (2012). Rol refleksii i refleksivnosti v razvitii sposobnostej uchashhihsja [The role of reflection and reflexivity in ability development in students]. *Psihologija. Zhurnal Vysshej shkoly jekonomiki [Psychology. Journal of the Higher School of Economics]*, *9*(4), 133–144.

Seligman, M. E., Rashid, T., & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, *61*(8), 774. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.61.8.774

Sheldon, K. M., Kashdan, T. B., & Steger, M. F. (Eds.). (2011). *Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/97 80195373585.001.0001

Shechovcova, L., Aleshin, V., & Shiryaeva, T. (2006). *Sovremeniy uchitel*: *psychologicheskiy portret*, *stanovlenie lichnosti* [Contemporary teacher: Psychological portrait, personality development]. St. Peterburg, SPbAPPO.

Solomin, I. L. (2006). *Sovremennie metodi psychologicheskoi expres-diagnostiki i professionalnogo konsultirovania* [Contemporary methods of psychological express-assessment and professional counseling]. St. Petersburg: Rech.

Tryapitsyna, A. P. (2010). Sovremenny uchitel: informatsiya k razmyshleniyu [Contemporary teacher: Food for thought]. *Vestnik Gertsenovskogo Universiteta [Gertsen University Bulletin]*, *3,* 29–39.