

# Some methodological approaches to the analysis of personal and professional teachers' distortions

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## Introduction

Professional activities have a significant influence on teachers' personal and professional development. These influences are not always positive. Therefore, the problem of personal and professional distortions is relevant, interesting and currently poorly understood.

The activities of a university teacher belong in the category of “helping occupations” because one of the main goals of a teacher is to facilitate students' acquisition of professional competences. This goal is connected to the need to help students address educational, social, psychological and other problems.

We will name only a few of the challenges that contemporary university professors in Russia frequently face. Many entrants do not have the systematic experience in terms of personal educational activity, and this situation is out of the parents' and teachers' control. When confronting the need to learn independently, to manage their time, and to distribute their work, these students are not able to cope with

these tasks. The results include the accumulation of arrears, inability to receive credits on time, and other problems.

Another problem is that many students work in their free time to ensure a suitably decent lifestyle (in accordance with their preferences). The majority of such students do not work in the field of their future profession but rather work in retail stores, bars, security agencies, and so on. Time spent working outside of school is not a new phenomenon. However, the current situation can be better paraphrased as students spending time studying outside of work. Finally, attending class after a sleepless night causes them to fall asleep in class. How can teachers incorporate these students into the work? How can a teacher encourage such students to be achievers? Moreover, many students come to school from nearby towns and villages. They take up residence in a hostel or on campus. Different people, who are occasionally minimally compatible, may share one room. Such a situation can cause many interpersonal conflicts. A teacher (or tutor) needs to help such students prevent and resolve these conflicts. These examples are needed to illustrate the thesis of the helping nature of pedagogic activities.

These activities are related to intensive contact with a large number of people and assisting those people in

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solving a variety of problems. This process is very stressful and emotionally exhausting and can consume a teacher's intellectual and emotional energy and his/her spare time.

Such activities can provoke personal and professional employee distortion. We consider two methodological approaches to the analysis of distortion. The first approach is connected to the notion of professionally important qualities, and the second is connected to the concepts of meaning, professional identification and alienation.

## Main results

It is believed that any profession assumes responsibility for the development of the qualities that are important for that occupation. The default assumption is that these qualities are positive.

A professional quality is an individual quality of a subject that influences the success of the development and effectiveness of the activity. On the one hand, these qualities are prerequisites of professional activity, and on the other hand, they are improved and refined during the activities to simulate new growth.

Professional qualities are multifunctional of their own nature; thus, with the requirements, they comply with a number of similar activities (e.g., the activities of teachers, psychologists, doctors, social workers, etc.) that are directed toward serving people. However, every profession has its “ensemble” of necessary qualities.

In modern Russian research, there is no strict distinction between concepts such as professional qualities, personal traits and professional skills and abilities. Such distinctions are especially difficult in teaching.

We cannot consider a profession as a unified set of professionally important qualities. First, it is hardly possible to make a final list of such qualities, and second, the originality of such qualities creates individual teachers' styles. Due to individual style, the missing negative features offset. The result is a harmonious system of features.

It is important to understand the mechanism of the distortion of professional features. One can speak of two opposing trends, the reduction (extinction) of these qualities and their hypertrophy (excess).

Let us consider how such distortion can occur. For example, communication with students requires a high level of development of features, such as kindness, compassion and empathy, among teachers. In the future, these qualities can be maintained at the same high level and can be further improve (activities

required!). However, the continued exercise of these qualities can be associated with “burnout”, which is also called “compassion fatigue”.

These qualities can be reduced, which leads to the development of callousness and emotional deafness as well as blindness to other people's problems. Moreover, one should pay attention to the fact that the appearance of the opposite qualities are protective in nature and, as a rule, are not realized by the person.

This situation reveals a paradox: the features that are undesirable for professional activities are formed directly because of these activities.

As another example, pedagogic activity is impossible without commitment. Some people even say that teaching is not work but is rather a service. Service means that the work is full of existential meaning and that the worker is sacrificing his/her strength and time for his/her work.

Unfortunately, 50–60-year-old Russians believe that the teacher is one who “does not spare his strength for his favourite work”, “gives himself to work and children”, and “is ready to sacrifice his free time”, and so on.

Younger Russians have also absorbed these views. Today's university students attribute the same characteristics to a good teacher (among other characteristics). Although such commitment is extremely attractive at first glance, it has its negative aspects. Thus, a teacher who fully devotes him/herself to work inadvertently reduces other spheres of his/her life and thus limits the potential for self-development and other self-realization. Thus, he/she puts him/herself at risk of not being interesting to students who need to communicate with teachers as versatile personalities. Additionally, the dedicated teacher usually responds to the demands of students with the same dedication without regard to their other interests.

In summary, we can say that the professional qualities that develop in the course of teaching activities can become professionally undesirable if they are hypertrophied. Overall, it is important to note that it is not the absence of any quality or the maximum development of a quality that enables productive academic work; rather it is a balance between these two possibilities, that is, the retention of the “balance in man” (F. Shlosser).

We would like to draw attention to one additional aspect of the problem, the adequacy of the manifestations of a professionally important quality in a professor's non-professional life. We have a bitter joke. They say that the teacher can be easily determined in any situation, in transport, in company and anywhere. For example, if a teacher begins to use professional or

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