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*Reliable Research Methods in Studies of the Value System  
and Life-Orientations of Futures Pedagogues.  
Theoretical Basis and Comparative Analysis*

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Narzędzia diagnostyczne w badaniach nad systemem wartości i orientacjami życiowymi przyszłych pedagogów. Podstawy teoretyczne i analiza porównawcza stosowanych metod

SUMMARY

The article investigates the issue of methodical approaches to the research of the value-semantic sphere of the personality. It is noted that the choice of research methods is made on the basis of the analysis of methodical approaches which are used in the sphere of planning, organizing and conducting empirical research of values and meaning of life and phenomena close to them. On the basis of certain criteria there appear some approaches which can be applied to an empirical study of the level of development of the value-semantic sphere of future teachers. The author marks a fundamental difference and similarity between the peculiarities of using experimental, psychometric, projective, psycho-semantic, phenomenological, narrative and biographical methodical approaches. Based on the presented theoretical considerations it is concluded that the desire to synthesize different approaches creates a combined qualitative and quantitative approach to the empirical study of the value-semantic sphere where drawbacks of some methodical approaches are balanced with benefits of others.

**Keywords:** values; meaning; agent; object; subjective

INTRODUCTION

Social change leads to confrontation between traditional values, norms and starts the process of reorientation. The structure of the personality of a young

person undergoes psychological and social change. Not fully understanding one's own needs, personal commitments, a person loses a clear idea of what he/she wants. After all, he/she wants what others want, showing full conformity or does what they want him/her to do. This is especially dangerous in a situation where there are no longer externally imposed meanings, nor culture or ability to create meanings. It is typical of young people who in their age range belong to the category of students. Therefore, there arises an urgent problem of studying the content of the value-semantic sphere as a regulator of social behaviour and life of the personality.

The study of the value-semantic sphere of future teachers as a system formation enables to view it from a perspective of integrity in the context of specific systemic, integrative relationships. At the same time, the study of the value-semantic sphere of future teachers should be approached comprehensively, not taking the sphere of values out of the context of a coherent personality structure, because its change is possible only when there are changes in the context of the systemic personal transformations.

#### CRITERIA FOR DIFFERENTIATION APPROACHES FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH THE VALUE SYSTEM AND LIFE-ORIENTATIONS OF THE PERSON

Empirical study of the personality, typical of psychology, is not an easy process. Its complexity is determined not only by a multifaceted personality phenomenology, but also by the fact that a person enters the world as an object and an agent. On the other hand, the value-semantic sphere is represented not only by values, but also by meanings. The meaning, the meaning of life in particular, functions as a long-term structure and trans-situational regulation, and its regulatory effect on the behaviour and activities of the personality can be traced over longer time spans. The meaning of life integrates semantic structures of a high degree of generality, stability, which rarely determine specific actions directly in specific situations. They regulate daily life indirectly, being embodied in mental structures and processes that ensure situational and operational regulation. Typically, between the meaning of life and certain actions of the personality, there are a large number of "intermediate" structures and processes which, in fact, form a wide mechanism of mental regulation of personal life. Hence, there are a number of important consequences for empirical research. On the one hand, the meaning of life is rarely directly objectified in behaviour and, consequently, the final links of the regulatory mechanism of the meaning of life can only be judged by the actions of the personality in a particular situation. On the other hand, regulatory structures and processes that are objectified in actions derive from the meaning of life and are available for empirical registration.

Study of the value-semantic sphere of the personality is multifaceted. However, all the available psychology research methods can be grouped based on relevant criteria. One group of the criteria is based on the view of the personality as a bearer of agent and object properties. Object-oriented study of the personality is characterized by the fact that the personality is viewed from its objectified, outside perspective. It is represented by systemic-structural models of the personality, theories of traits, different typologies. An example of the implementation of this approach is the use of multivariate research methods, mostly questionnaires such as the "Big Five Inventory". The weak point of the object-oriented approach, according to Abul'hanova-Slavskaja (1981), is the loss of the "living personality", the personality that thinks, acts and develops (Abul'hanova-Slavskaja 1981, p. 19). Thomae, the author of the cognitive theory of personality, criticizing the use of questionnaires and tests, stresses that supporters of questionnaires ignore the personality as a critical and thinking being, imposing their system of concepts and world views on respondents (according to: Ancyferova 1992, p. 5).

Agent-oriented approach aims to study the personality from "inside", from an agent perspective. Personality is not a set of objective characteristics in space of diagnostic indicators, but a bearer of a certain world view, a microcosm of individual values and meanings, an agent of life and self-development. Chudnovskij wrote that "according to the agent-oriented approach in the characterization of the personality, the role of an active, creative beginning is emphasized in human behaviour. This means that people are not just subject to external circumstances, their behaviour is determined internally, and this allows them to become masters of their own destiny" (Chudnovskij 1991, p. 30). This means that the fundamental theoretical and empirical studies should be based "on the study of a full real life of the personality, those human life relationships that form the basis of a holistic life span" (Ancyferova 1992, p. 138). And the main "task of the researcher is to find out the main components and mechanisms of man's inner world functioning which actually ensure one's well-being, comfort or deform one's life, and which, at the same time, one is not aware of" (Ancyferova 1992, p. 132).

Empirical indicators of meaning are varied: from the personality's subjective ideas about the meaning of life, to the subjective awareness of internal and external obstacles for its implementation. In my view, this significantly extends the range of the research objects and the choice of techniques and tools.

So, if the object-oriented approach is aimed at studying persistent personal formations, crystallized in behaviour, in the properties and personality traits, the main objective of the agent-oriented approach is the study of the personality as a representative of a certain internal point of view, a certain worldview, detection of mechanisms to fulfil his/her personality, studying a personality as

a participant of one's own life and self-development. Obviously, both of these approaches are necessary, the implementation of one of them without referring to the other will always be insufficient. However, in my view, priority should be given to the study of inner subjective reality of a person, his/her internal value position.

At the heart of another group of criteria there is a procedure for collecting, processing and interpreting factual material. The content of the criteria include binary opposition that appeared in psychological research methodology during confrontation between the paradigms of the natural science and the humanities. These include: objectivity – subjectivity; causality – intentionality; nomothetic – ideographic; quantitative – quality; monologic – dialogic; directive – non-directive (Karpinskij 2008).

Therefore, based on the above mentioned criteria we can identify several methodical approaches concerning the empirical study of the value-semantic sphere of the personality: experimental, psychometric, projective, psycho-semantic, phenomenological, narrative and biographical (Karpinskij 2008). Their differentiation is very conditional, as nowadays scholars implement combined methods that have elements of different approaches. Urgent discussions of the method issue indicate the beginning of a new stage in the development of the psychological theory of the meaning of life. This is a stage where the meaning of life turns from the subject-matter of abstract philosophizing and theorizing into a psychological variable that is available for empirical knowledge and transformation (Karpinskij 2008).

#### THE OBJECT – SUBJECT APPROACHES FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH THE VALUE SYSTEM AND LIFE-ORIENTATIONS OF FUTURES PEDAGOGUES

Experimental approach to the empirical study of values and meanings, that presupposes the establishment of objective laws of affective experiences, moral feelings, volitional regulation and other phenomena at a personal-semantic level, was first described by Bozhovich (1968). It is based on identification of semantic formations in the effects of deviations from the code of conduct, which is presupposed by “an intellectualized presumption of explanation”. However, during the 80s and 90s of the last century, Bratus (1981), Patjaeva (1983) and Chudnovskij (1993) described the following components of the value-semantic sphere: motives, semantic constructs, semantic dispositions, personality values, which have a non-situational, generalized character, relative freedom from external influences. Thus, Smirnov (1996) suggested that the experimental method is invalid regarding diagnostic assessment of the value-semantic sphere, as it is impossible to control the independent variables in this experiment. It was also taken into account that there is no subject-matter of an experimental study

of meaning in foreign psychology, because humanistic and existential psychology, which started studying the problem of meaning, fundamentally rejected an experimental approach to the study of man and all purely human phenomena. However, modern psychology, which is considered to be an empirical study in a broad sense, and not highly experimental one, widely practises non-experimental approaches to the empirical study of the problem of meaning.

The experimental study of the values and meaning is objective, causal, usually monothetic, quantitative and qualitative, monologic, mostly directive by nature.

Psychometric approach is based on the procedure of psychological assessment, where the researcher identifies a quantitative manifestation of various properties of meanings with the help of standardized techniques. The main source of diagnostic information is self-consciousness, which more or less adequately reflects the level of awareness of life as well as the content and dynamics of practical implementation, the incentives and other characteristics of meaning. The most commonly used assessment devices are psychological tests that belong to a group of self-report questionnaires. In present-day foreign psychology two types of questionnaires have been singled out. Some of them are aimed to diagnose the intensity of experiencing meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life regardless of the content of individual meaning of life: PIL (Purpose in Life Test), SONG (Seeking of Noetic Goals), LRI (Life Regard Index), LAP (Life Attitude Profile), MILD (Meaning in Life Depth Instrument), SOC (Sense of Coherence Scale), TND (Test Noodynamiki), SMS (Spiritual Meaning Scale), LPQ (Life Purpose Questionnaire), PMI (Personal Meaning Index), STS (Self-Transcendence Scale). The other group of questionnaires are focused on the content of the meaning of life, but are indifferent to the level of general meaningfulness-meaninglessness of life: SOMP (Sources of Meaning Profile), SLM (Sources of Life Meaning), PMP (Personal Meaning Profile). They replicate methodical procedures of psychological research of values: free choice, ranking, paired comparison, subjective scaling, attribution of value categories of certain objects.

The researcher of the meaning of life Reker and Peacock divided all the available questionnaires into three types: questionnaires of the general level of life awareness, problem-oriented and contextually-targeted questionnaires (Reker, Peacock 1981). Questionnaires of the general level of life awareness reflect the content, stability and generalization of the personality's existential ideas about life being meaningless or meaningful, purposeful or chaotic. Problem-oriented questionnaires are aimed at measuring the relative contribution of various activities and spheres of life into general awareness of life. Contextually-targeted questionnaires are used to measure

the level of awareness of life in the context of certain situations (for example, a situation with threatening somatic diseases (AIDS, cancer, heart attack, heart stroke, etc.).

In Soviet psychology it is worth considering a multivariate test of meaning-life orientations elaborated by Leontev (2000). It is, by nature, very far from its English counterpart (test PIL). Because of its simplicity, efficiency and objectivity of the received information, such (psychometric) methods are essential both in research and in practice. It is possible to compensate some disadvantages of this method, particularly reduce its testologic character, having applied a qualifying theoretical analysis of the received results using mathematical modelling elements (factor analysis).

In my view, it would be good to have questionnaires that simultaneously assessed the content and formal (structural, functional, energy, temporal, dynamic) properties of the meaning of life. The use of standardized techniques, including personality questionnaires will be a real application of the psychometric approach to the empirical study of the meaning of life.

Psychometric study of values and meaning is an objective, causal, nomothetic, quantitative, monologic, directive by nature.

#### THE SUBJECT – SUBJECT APPROACHES FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH THE VALUE SYSTEM AND LIFE-ORIENTATIONS OF FUTURES PEDAGOGUES

Another approach, projective one, covers methods, based on the psychological mechanism of projection. Projective techniques, according to Leont'ev (1998), is based on the processes of imagination, which, like processes of actual behaviour, are regulated by semantic structures of the personality. The product of imagination always contains a reflection of personal meaning, which can solve the deep-seated meaning-creating structures of the personality and predict its actual behaviour (Leont'ev 1998).

Nowadays, there is no projective technique, strictly designed to diagnose the meaning of life. At best, associative and additive methods are applied. The former ones are represented by the technique of free associations with the word-stimulus “the meaning of life”, consequently the researcher defines the “semantic field”, a concept in the individual consciousness, not mentioning the very meaning of life as a semantic structure of the personality. The latter methods are applied by means of completing unfinished sentences like “The meaning of my life is...”, which in practice is no more informative than direct questionnaires and tests about the meaning of life. I agree with the opinion of Karpinskij that “in case of proper material selection of the incentive material, techniques of a constitutive, interpretive, expressive and impressive type can be very useful for empirical studies of the meaning of life” (Karpinskij 2008, p. 43).

In the context of the selected general criteria, the projective approach is subjective, intentional, ideographic, more qualitative than quantitative, monologic, non-directive.

Psycho-semantic approach is seen as a set of empirical methods aimed at modelling a categorical structure and highlighting the subjective content of basic values of individual consciousness. As a result of applying the psycho-semantic method there is a subjective semantic space, which is regarded as an operating analogue (model) of the system of meanings in an individual or collective consciousness. In present-day Ukrainian psychology this approach is presented in two versions: experimental psycho-semantic and psychology of subjective semantics. The subject-matter of the methods of experimental psycho-semantic, according to Petrenko, is “meanings, in which reflections and attitudes are fused, and personal meanings and sensual canvas of which are inseparable” (Petrenko 1988, p. 79). In terms of subjective semantics, according to Artem’eva, the meaning is “a trace of interaction with an object, phenomenon, and situation in the form of relation to it” (Artem’eva 1999, p. 11).

The meaning of an object, according to Artem’eva, is a converted form or a trace of activities with the object in the individual consciousness, and the system of meanings generated in the history of individual activities is subjective semantics (Artem’eva 1999). The connotative meaning and subjective semantics are forms of semantic structure representation in the individual consciousness. These are a kind of “projection” of deep personality-semantic formations on the categorical content and structure of an individual world view. We can say that the connotative meaning and subjective semantics constitute phenomenology of personal meanings that are on the surface of consciousness. An example of the psycho-semantic approach in present-day studies of the meaning of life is Karpinskij technique “Psycho-biographical semantic differential” which is designed to study mental phenomenology of meaningful and senseless life (Karpinskij 2008).

In terms of the above mentioned criteria for the generalized description of methodical approaches to the empirical study of the meaning in life, the psycho-semantic approach is subjective, intentional, nomothetic, and it is a vivid example of the quantitative approach, monologic, non-directive.

The subject-matter of the phenomenological approach is subjective human experiences concerning the meaning of life and related phenomena: meaningfulness and meaninglessness of life, semantic-genetic values and situations of meaning-creation and meaning-losses and other objects and phenomena, the meanings of which are significant for the personality. The phenomenological approach is characterized by typical introspective self-reports (oral or written) that describe the content, dynamics, modality, intensity of a person’s inner feel-

ings about his/her life and its meaning. The most common methods of collecting empirical data are an unstructured conversation, that is going on in conditions of trust, equal relations between the researcher and the research participant (a phenomenological interview), or an essay on a given topic. The basic requirement when interpreting the results of the phenomenological research is to avoid including the participant's feelings into terminology of any theory. Final results of the study can be verified by an empirical knowledge of life, but not by the content of a scientific theory (Karpinskij 2008).

The phenomenological approach to the empirical study of the meaning of life is by nature subjective, intentional, ideographic, qualitative, dialogic, non-directive.

Narrative approach ("life story approach"), according to Potter and Wetherell, is a branch of qualitative methodology of discourse analysis focused on the study of speech and texts that are used by people to interpret themselves, the world, and their own life (Potter, Wetherell 1987). An empirical unit of the narrative analysis of the meaning of life is "a biographical narrative", that is a person's narration about his/her life, in which the person expresses his/her individual understanding of the meaning of life. The main research method of the narrative analysis is a life story interview. In its basic function narrative is a way of ordering meaningful personality's experience, a mechanism of "crystallization" of the meaning of life. Thus the narrative method extracts the meaning from the personality's story about his/her life.

Advantages of the narrative analysis in the empirical study of the meaning of life are shown in the research into the sources of the meaning of life in older age conducted by Kaufman (1986). The method of semi-structured interviews, developed by the German psychologist Thomae (1988), is narrative from a methodical point of view. A narrative research method concerning the meaning of life is found in a number of influential ultra-modern personality theories, such as three level model of personality by McAdams (2001) and dialogic conception of "Self" by Hermans (2000). All narrative theories are close because of the metaphor of the personality as the narrator of his/her own life and the "architect" of its meaning.

Narrative approach to the empirical analysis of the meaning of life can be described as subjective, intentional, ideographic, quality, dialogic, non-directive.

Another approach that has been singled out in the context of the study of the value-semantic sphere is a biographical approach. It is a set of techniques and means of organizing and conducting psychological research into the meaning of life and other psycho-biographical structures of the personality that presupposes collection, analysis and interpretation of information about life as an objective result of the personality's life. The main purpose of the biographical approach in



psychology is reproduction of a subjective and agent aspect of life of a particular individual. The subjective aspect involves reconstruction of subjective images according to the sources of biographical information which reflect objective spatiotemporal and semantic relationships of life events. The agent aspect focuses not so much on the reflective function of psycho-biographical personality structures and subjective representations of consciousness in the context of real life, as on the regulatory one. If in the subjective aspect the personality is an observer of his/her own life, in the agent aspect the personality is already a creator of his/her own biography. The meaning of life that is investigated on the basis of the biographical approach is also revealed from its two sides: firstly, as a subjective representation, a form of mental reflection, a subjectively transformed form of the system of objective life attitudes that bind the identity of the individual events and life in general; secondly, as a special regulatory authority that conforms the individual life to a sustainable system of life attitudes opposed to situational stimuli and instant impulses (Loginova 1986).

So, biographical research in psychology can be directed to phenomenological and regulatory (substrate) aspects of the meaning of life. In the first case, the subject-matter of the study will be meaningful ties in the subjective picture of the personality's life, semantic construction and the content of subjective biographical images in individual consciousness. In the second case the focus of the research is shifted to the regulatory effects that the meaning of life creates in cognitive activities aimed at forming adequate ideas about their own biography, and practical activities aimed at the development of life. Here, we can also trace that the meaning of life determines the system of processes of a conscious self-regulation of the personality's way of life, which includes setting life goals and objectives, modelling meaningful living conditions, planning, forecasting and programming one's life, evaluating and controlling the results of life, making important decision, adjusting the life course. The biographical analysis in psychology can use various fragments of life (events, situations, periods, one's life partner, biographically significant others, etc.) as units. But it becomes the analysis of the meaning of life only when the researcher locates the place and identifies the role of these units in the continuum of the participant's life, directed towards the complete fulfilment of the meaning of life.

Biographical approach cannot be clearly classified according to the stated above criteria. This is due to its integrative status, which includes a number of specific methods for collecting empirical data – questionnaires, archives, tests and so on. According all criteria the biographical method occupies an intermediate position and belongs to the mixed strategies of empirical research into the meaning of life.

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## CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the abovementioned arguments, it should be noted that a more detailed analysis of dynamic changes in the value-semantic sphere of the personality and the conditions for value development and self-development as a regulator in professional development of future teachers will be facilitated by the study of the personality's inner system relations from the position of a personality-integrative and systematic approach.

The value-semantic sphere as a complex and multi-dimensional mental formation involves the use of various strategies and tactics of an empirical study. The choice of methodical approaches is appropriate only when a researcher views the meaning of life as a difficult mental reality that has varied manifestations in the mind, personality and mental regulations of real life. If the researcher reduces the importance of one aspect – phenomenological, personality-related or active one, then both narrow and methodical possibilities of its study are restricted. The use of two or more methodical approaches in one empirical study increases the reliability of the final results.

The combination of different approaches to the empirical study of the value-semantic sphere of the personality lets us distinguish a combined, qualitative-quantitative approach, when the disadvantages of some methodical approaches are levelled by the advantages of others. This qualitative-quantitative approach is kind of verification of the personality-integrative approach proposed by Ball (2006), and based on ratio-humanistic ideological and methodological guidance. From a methodological perspective there are integrated constructive components of various concepts that correspond to different points of understanding and personality cognition and there is an opportunity to complement each other, and from another perspective, an ontological one, there is a holistic consideration of the human individual (a person) in the unity of his/her physical, psychological and spiritual properties. This allows us to consider a phenomenon (including a psychological one) as a system in which things are formed by a set of elements are combined by logical strong links (a structure) and certain integrative (systemically important) properties, functioning as subsystems. Therefore, the study of values and meanings of future teachers as a system will allow to analyse them from a perspective of integrity, focusing on identifying the diversity of links and relationships that occur both within them and in interaction with the environment.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Autor artykułu przedstawia problem wyboru podejść metodycznych do badań wartościowo-znaczeniowej zawartości osobowości. Podkreślono, iż wybór metod badawczych odbywa się na zasadzie analizy strategii metodycznych, stosowanych w zakresie planowania, organizacji i przeprowadzania badań empirycznych wartości i sensu życia oraz fenomenów z nimi spokrewnionych. Przedstawiono podstawowe podejścia do empirycznego badania poziomu rozwoju wartościowo-znaczeniowej zawartości osobowości przyszłych nauczycieli. Zauważono podstawowe różnice i podobieństwa w osobliwościach stosowania eksperymentalnego, psychometrycznego, projekcyjnego, psychosemantycznego, fenomenologicznego, narracyjnego oraz biograficznego podejścia metodycznego. Na podstawie zaproponowanych dociekań teoretycznych wyciągnięto wnioski, że dążenie do systematyzacji różnorodnych podejść generuje wspólne podejście jakościowe i ilościowe do empirycznego badania zawartości wartościowo-znaczeniowej, w którego ramach wady jednych podejść metodycznych zostają zrównoważone przez zalety innych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wartości; znaczenie; podmiotowy; subiektywny; przedmiotowy