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## EXCHANGE OF GOOD EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING ACTIVITIES

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### ABSTRACT

The article presents a research, whose goal is the design, implementation and improvement of a model for exchange of good educational practices. It is based on constructivist methodology, models of active teaching and learning and principles, strategies and techniques of Adlerian psychology. The model is implemented in the training activities of the Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training (DIIT), Trakia University - Stara Zagora, during the 2005 – 2010 period. The used research methods are - experiment, observation, discussion with specific reflexive procedures, questionnaire. The developed model for the exchange of good practices provides opportunities for professional and personal development to participants, construction of educational strategies, developing a personal action plan in relation to their own personal and professional career development.

**Key words:** good educational practices, teacher training, constructivist methodology, Kolb's learning cycle, positive learning environment

Lifelong learning is a part of the modern people thinking and practice. Representatives of various institutions and organizations intensively communicate in the European educational space. They build networks and share best practices. It is possible to talk about a new kind of culture - the culture of sharing good practices. In the field of teaching staff training and career development the exchange of good practices implemented in various forms - courses, one-year specializations, conferences, educational forums, seminars, roundtables and discussions. There is a need for more focused and structured approach to the exchange of good practices.

The theoretical study shows outstanding problems in the field of lifelong learning and the actuality of the implementation of personal-oriented qualification process with exchange of good practices. The study purpose is to develop and test a model for exchange of

good practices of teachers and other pedagogical specialists. In connection with the objective are formulated the following tasks: 1) Study the problem of exchange of good practices. 2) Selection of appropriate tools of research. 3) Selection of appropriate principles, methods and tools for sharing best practices by teaching staff. 4) Develop a version of the model for the exchange of good practices of teaching staff. The object of study is the teaching staff qualifications and the subject of study is the exchange of best practices by teaching staff.

As a theoretical basis for the model it is used constructivist theory, experiential learning theory, David Kolb's learning cycle, principles, strategies and techniques of Adlerian psychology to build a positive educational environment.

Constructivism is the basis of the modern personality-oriented education. It is a suitable choice for both methodological basis of the qualification process of teaching staff as a whole and in the process of exchanging good practices. This is due to the fact that the qualifying format for teachers and the forms of exchanging good practices involve people with different experiences and skills, learning

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styles, motivation and values. Constructivism is particularly useful because it allows "fitting" to the new knowledge, skills, competences in existing cognitive structures of adult learners.

Leading part in it has the life experience of the individual learner. M. Mihova called him a philosophy of learning based on the fact that when we, people, reflect on our experience, we build understanding of the world in which we are living. In learning it is used the already built thought patterns and cognitive structures in order to acquire new experience [1].

Constructive learning implies: active studying, problem solving, improving skills for knowledge transfer, stimulating learning environment, upgrading the old knowledge, solving authentic problems, focusing on the accumulation of personal experience; implementing strategies for accumulating the own experience, not just the knowledge itself; promoting critical thinking and more [2].

Constructivist approach focuses on how to learn rather than on achievements. Commonly used methods and forms are working on projects, discussions in small groups, solving problems, linking theory to practice.

Kolb's theory for Experiential Learning is one of the best known and most cited educational theories [3], [4]. It features prominently to the performances on the modernization of Bulgarian education. According to Kolb "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." [4]. This concept presents a way of structuring the course and allows understanding specifically how to implement a trade or a whole course, so that students can be assisted in their learning. The theory of learning from experience suggests that learning takes a place in a cycle of four phases related to action ("doing"), emotional perception (feeling), observing, reflecting on the results (reflection), thinking and planning. An important feature of the theory is that different phases are associated to certain learning styles. People differ in their learning styles (there are activists, reflective types, academics, pragmatists). Acceptance of this fact is an important prerequisite for trainers and learners to understand alternative approaches and be more flexible in different learning situations.

The main objectives of the developed model for exchange of good educational practices are:

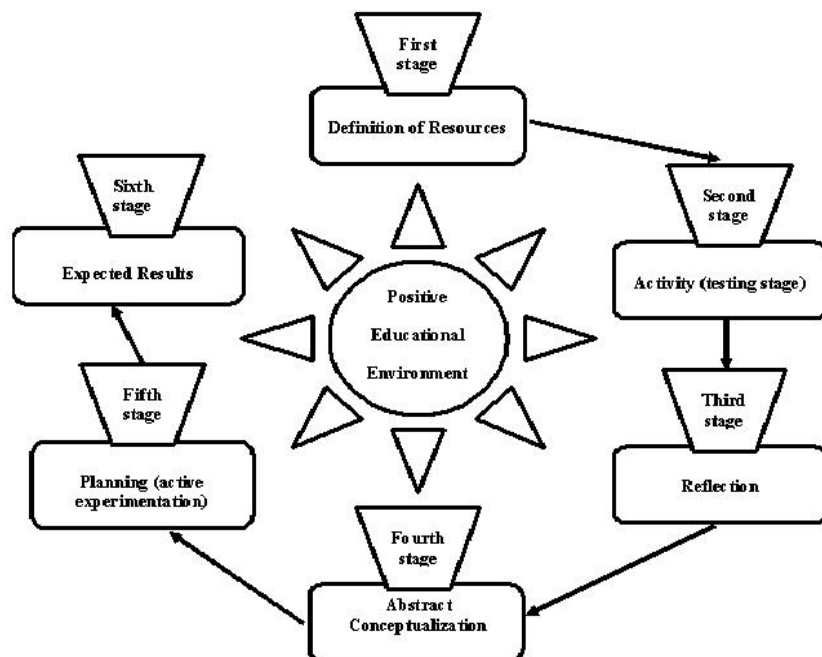
- Presentation and exchange of good practices in education;
- Professional and personal development of participants;
- Development of educational strategies;
- Developing a personal plan of action in relation to their own personal and professional career development.

Structure and content of the model. The model for the exchange of good practices is a modern democratic humane educational process. It is based on interaction, as opposed to imperative authoritarian educational process. Pedagogical impact is typical for the authoritarian educational process. The interaction's priorities are process, activities, communication, dialogue, an opportunity for expression, reflection. The main interaction's indications and tools are dialogue, mental activity, freedom of choice, the situation of success, positive atmosphere and optimism in the evaluation and reflection.

The model for the exchange of good practice consists of six phases / components. The first stage is determining the resources. The next four correspond to stages of David Kolb's experiential learning cycle - activity, reflection, summary / conceptualization and planning. The sixth stage includes the expected results. The establishing and maintaining a positive educational environment plays an important role for the effective functioning of the model (**Fig. 1**).

First stage - definition of resources. It begins with participant's introduction and presentation. There are a variety of techniques for participant's introduction and presentation and for "ice-breaking" in the scientific-applied literature. A lot of techniques are selected for the purposes of the model for the exchange of best practices. They help

- identifying the group profile;
- acquaintance with past participants experience which is an important factor in adults education, training and performances;
- participants resources/ competences rationalization. (The participants are experts and resource persons in different areas).



**Fig. 1.** Model for exchange of good practices

After that the achievements, areas of professional interest, proposed "for exchange" best practices are summarized. This shapes group and individual resources.

Second stage. Activity (testing stage). Individually or in teams, participants carry out one or more activities. During this time the focus is on what to do. All participants are strongly involved in the activity. It is not desirable to reflect. The purposeful reflection is delayed.

Third stage. Reflection. Participants go back to the beginning of the activities carried out and review what has been done and tested. Presentation skills, skills to listen, paying attention, asking questions, request, receiving and giving feedback are important to establish the results and discuss them with others. The attitudes, values and beliefs have a strong influence in this process.

It is difficult to apply the model when the participants haven't reflective skills and skills to recognize the experience and after that to connect this experience with different theoretical conceptions. This is avoided by use of structured reflexive procedures. S. Kashlev

offers a reflexive procedure with the following components: accurate determination of the development state, determining the reasons/factors for this development, development productivity assessment [4].

In order to "accurately determine the development status", every participant verbally determines what is his development state in the following areas: emotions, needs, motivations, interests, values, business knowledge skills. In determining the reasons / factors for this development, the attention is drawn to: the action/ interaction success, different types of activities change (diversity of activities); interesting content; favorable atmosphere of communication; the opportunity for creativity, dialogue, personal value of the discussed problem/ activity carried out and innovative technologies [5].

Fourth stage. Abstract conceptualization. During this stage the participants interpret the results and look for links between them, based on both direct experience and its theoretical background. In this phase, attitudes, values and beliefs also play a role. The ideas of best practices are connecting, build out, new ideas

are born. Searching for and find answers. Make generalizations.

Fifth stage. Planning (active experimentation). Planning allows predicting what is likely to happen. Then strategies develop. And develop action plans relating to personal and professional career development of participants.

Sixth stage. Expected results analysis.

Expected results include:

- Personal orientations: attitudes, motives, interests, values.
- Knowledge: good practice adoptions in content and technology perspective; exploring new concepts in learning and teaching, understanding of the teacher's and students' subjective position in educational process, educational change understanding.
- Skills: skills for group work; skills to use interactive methods, presentation skills, human relations skills, facilitation skills; career development management skills; skills for public performance.

Building a positive educational environment. Humanization and democratization of education is closely related to the construction of a positive educational environment and the implementation of strategies and techniques for encouragement. Adler's principles of individual psychology applied in education are good theoretical basis for building a positive educational environment. The development of positive attitudes and skills for self-encouragement and encouragement the partners in each interaction is a challenge for trainers and trainees [6], [7].

All this is related to: 1) clarification of beliefs and behaviors that discourage, 2) formation and development of beliefs that encourage. They may be viewed as "negative" and "positive" factors or factors that determine respectively negative and positive educational environment. Negative factors are: negative expectations; unreasonably high expectations; overambitious; emphasis on competition, focus on mistakes. Positive factors are connected to the availability and development of more encouraging believes by more acceptance; understanding and changing the irrational beliefs; recognizing phrases and actions that lead to discouragement; emphasizing the

positive, on the individual strengths, the efforts and progress; understanding the differences between praise and encouragement [8].

Implementation of the model. The proposed model for exchange of good educational practices experimented with teachers and other educational staff that took part in the Sixth National Pedagogical Forum with international participation'2005 organized by Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training, Trakia University - Stara Zagora. During the period 2006-2010, this model was applied in the next annual forums. It was the factor that established the Forum as an effective form of exchange of good practices and personal professional development of educators. Interactive approach is applied and improved in the exchange of good practices. This approach emphasizes the participants' strengths, looking at the opportunities rather than the barriers. It is multiplication effect of reflective procedures that stands to be the exchange of best practices. Building concepts and personal action plans of each participant enhance motivation to participate in training and certification programs as well as feeling satisfaction because of the achievements.

In 2006 was set a successful implementation of the model in short-term courses and one-year psychological-pedagogical specialization of DIITT "Child and adolescent psychology". The exchange of good educational practices is implemented as part of training in each academic discipline, as a separate discipline, preparation and presentation of a final graduating work and other activities outside the qualification process of specialization, made by its participants. Since 2008 the positive results encourage the application in another specialization - "Organization and Management of Education" which is oriented to school principles. Since 2010 the exchange of good practices has been associated with the development of key competencies defined by the European reference framework. Method of projects and a technology for joint solving problems are used. Group graduate developed a product that is produced electronically and can be used in their future professional activity and by other educators.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Educational theories of constructivism, experiential learning and David Colb's cycle are suitable theoretical basis for developing a model for the exchange of best practices of teaching staff.
2. The presented conceptions for building a positive learning environment based on individual psychology of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs, determines the model's component "positive educational environment" which is essential for the effectiveness of the model.
3. The developed model for the exchange of best practices provides opportunities for professional and personal development of participants, construction of educational strategies, developing a personal action plan in relation to their own personal and professional career development.
4. Determining resources to exchange best practices, providing additional material in the course of activities leads in depth and scientifically justified summary and conceptualization.
5. Variations of reflexive procedures, feedback and panel discussions create the conditions for the improvement of individual orientations, acquiring knowledge and skills, multifaceted development of personal action plan.

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