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Problem-based seminar strategies at higher educational establishments. Novel approach

A seminar is one of the most important training process forms at higher educational institutions enabling to successfully achieve objectives of developing constructing thinking skills of students. Contemporary higher educational system concentrates considerable attention on the issue of seminars owing to their certain features and advantages due to which a seminar is claimed to be a top-performing training process form. First of all it should be noted that seminars enable students to grasp the contents of a subject for a teacher can systematically correct their work and thoroughly bring them to awareness of particular problems, create conditions for explanation of complicated issues or lead them to self-guided solution of such issues.

Within the frame of developing novel training approaches, special attention should be drawn to the issue of importance of a seminar for building-up logical thinking and practical skills of making up independent decisions by students. It is a seminar that facilitates a result-oriented and mutual contact of a teacher and students that has an advantage of creating a situation where a teacher concentrates his attention on a rather small group of students that in its turn affords opportunities for grounded and creative discussion of a wide range of problematic issues.

Prior to getting down to review of particular methods and forms of seminars, a „strategy” of holding seminars should be defined. The matter is that availability of seminar programs and plans establishes conditions for organizational execution of this form of work with the audience. Specialty of a faculty (section), provision of relative literature to the audience, positioning of a department and interests of a teacher within all methods of training enable implementation of one of the teaching technique strategies of giving seminars.

Strategy 1. Advanced study of primary sources. It is a traditional approach formed at earlier stages of evolution and development of higher education teaching technique system.

Objects for analysis in the majority of cases are works of scientists that represent domestic tradition, as well as of foreign thinkers who contributed to development of the defined range of problems of training. For this purpose, semi-

nars should not replicate lectures but should be their consistent historical and theoretical background. A weak point of this strategy is heterogeneous quality of resources that in fact can influence accumulation of practical skills by students to certain extent.

Strategy 2. Review of major problems. To a large degree, it is also a traditional approach within which at seminars they deeply study problems that were only briefly outlined at lectures. This strategy comprises different elements of methodical ware (textbooks, reference books, original texts, etc) that enables to combine historic aspects of study of a certain range of problems with contemporary scientific concepts regarding them. It sometimes produces an illusion of a too easy possibility to implement the strategy in question. The truth is that the situation is much more complicated. Availability of a developed system of methodical ware, as a result of which a study group can be very well-trained, requires a teacher to invest significant efforts and have relevant qualification when holding a seminar at the level that would correspond that one of competence of the group or a problem complexity.

Strategy 3. Comparative and example approach. It comprises well-knowns teaching technique methods oriented on singling out two or three most significant periods within a certain epoch and assessing their contribution into development of the field of knowledge being studied that in its turn is connected with generally significant progress of its structure. It enables to perceive peculiarities of historical process of the development and establishment of a new field of knowledge during a particular epoch and to understand importance of a researcher as of a social tendency integrator. Typically, it is not a problem for students to analyze an epoch and assess scientific accomplishments of a particular thinker. However, it is relatively unlikely for students to be familiar with practices and methods of correlation and comparison thus with the things that assure application of a comparative approach at seminars. So this part of their activity is a weak point of the strategy and is required for comprehension of specific tasks and assignments. This strategy becomes retrogressive where a teacher reserves a comparative part for himself (with summarizing lines).

Strategy 4. Emphasize of cultural and historical context. It allows us to consider establishment of new knowledge as a social and cultural phenomenon. In addition, a historical process of development of specific scientific knowledge is not detached from the general historical, cultural and social background but concentrates its most significant features. Teachers who choose this strategy, in fact, commence together with students to carry out a complicated and interesting educational experiment.

It goes without saying that a particular seminar may have features to make each strategy vital. At the same time a teacher can apply elements of this or that strategy. Availability and level of methodical assurance of a training process is a major thing in achieving a problem-based seminar goal.

We can not classify a seminar taking into account only activities of a teacher, no matter how much they tend to be based on strategies of a problem-based seminar. A seminar first of all is characterized by actions of students. It is natural to single out fundamental functions of a problem-based seminar. They are:

- **cognitive and heuristic** that is related to expression of more clear, specific, deep and general conclusions, reinforcement of significance of known theses, establishment of the fundamental views;
- **synthesizing** that forms generalization skills, an ability to state general conclusions and theses, find fundamental relationships and consistent patterns, see actual tendencies behind chaotic facts;
- **theoretical and value-based** that is expressed in establishment of equilibrium between an integral worldview system, evolutionary set of rules, motives and ideals that form the basis for purposefulness and moral orientation of an individual;
- **logical and methodological** that manifests itself in the process of creative discussion of educational material and is fixed in logic of active notional connections and relationships that can be reconstructed in other spheres later on.

Implementation of problem-based seminar functions determines certain levels manifested in work of teachers and students. To acquire methods of preparing and holding a problem-based seminar means to coordinate different levels and to structure into a coherent system elements that belong to different levels. Continuity of the link „problematic situation – contradiction – skills – knowledge” mediated by conditions of activities is the major goal for a teacher when giving problem-based seminars.

Achievement of problem-based seminar purposes leads to a series of alterations in worldview and mindset of students, their individual, even collective participation in discussion of problematic situations. During lectures and in the process of preparation to seminars, as a consequence of general cultural background, students have certain knowledge and skills that they see as trivial. Some of them need to be singled out and updated as epistemologically important and valuable thus justifying necessity to use knowledge gained by the generations before us.

It is clear that seminars induce complicated and important work aimed to structure and test knowledge. But first of all seminars involve intensification of work by students, management of the process of reinforcement of skills and knowledge that assures unity of theory and practice when studying training material.

A methodical task for a teacher is to create conditions for a group active work and stir interest to training material that results in intensive formation of skills and abilities.

A goal of intensification of students activity should be realized by a teacher as a basis of teaching techniques applied to a problem-based seminar. It is necessary to avoid a situation where students activity turns into a spontaneous force

that disorganizes the training process and adversely affects educational aspect. Quantitative indicators of student activities include: attendance of seminars, a total number of speeches during a seminar, participation in discussions at seminars, elaboration of reports and papers, stability of the level and nature of questions during consultation classes. Activity of students when preparing to and giving a problem-based seminar may comprise:

- informal attitude to study of a subject, creative approach thereto, self-dependence in understanding of basic theses of a subject being studied, advanced study of primary sources;
- striving to use perceived theses in the sphere of specific subjects and connect theoretical training with social practice;
- acquisition of skills to present your knowledge on a particular issue and reasoning of its contents to identify the essence of the subject being analyzed, evaluation of other points of view, comparative approach to analysis that complies with provisions of different scientific systems.

Activity of students during the process of preparing to and giving a seminar provides for successful result of any seminar form. That is why other problems with regard to improvement of teaching techniques at higher educational establishments concentrate, as in focus, in an active attitude to a seminar of a student, as well as of a teacher.

True intensification of student activity can be achieved only if a teacher convinces students in action that the fundamental aim of a seminar is to reinforce knowledge, understand new truths, acquire integral scientific approach, learn modern methodology.

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Abstract

The article analyses teaching technique strategies of a problem-based seminar as a methodological basis for acquisition of theoretical and practical skills by students.

Key words: problem-based seminar, teaching technique strategies of problem-based seminars, novel approaches to training, comparative approach.