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**THE MODEL OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR  
HELPING SPECIALISTS' JOBS**

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*Abstract*

The model of educational environment introduced in this article is oriented on specialists working with orphans, who graduated from orphanages or from group homes with a family - type structure, and beginning an independent life. At the base of this model lies a unique programme, used in training "Alumni Support of all Forms of Care (Orphanages or Group Homes Education)", developed by the Federal State Scientific Institution "Institute of the Study of Childhood, Family and Education Russian Academy of Education". The simulated educational environment suggests the educational process going in three directions, along three axes, and offers changes in professional position, professional competence, and affiliation to a professional community. Educational environment is built on modern informational and telecommunication technologies and websites which are introduced on public services. Special program of development was worked out by the team of researchers of the Institute; this article describes some educational results of specialists who took part in the approbation of the model.

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**Keywords:** Model of Educational Environment, Orphanages or Group Homes Education, professional competence.



## **1. Introduction**

Introducing the concept of “educational environment” relates to a deviation from the previously accepted understanding of the concept of the educational process as a line or trajectory of normative student development, and accepting a nonlinear nature of the progress. Educational environment represents a variety of individual growth forms and diversity of educational possibilities (Shendrick, 2003).

Currently, the concept of educational environment doesn't have an unambiguous interpretation. Researchers identify it differently, adding something new to the consideration of the essence of this phenomenon.

We will adhere to the definition of educational environment as the place of a person's educational movement (Cuker, 2004). Each educational environment, that is being created, is quite unified and homogeneous, and it gives the opportunity for growth (movement).

When filled with content and an organized formation, educational environment considers the demand of its subjects, affects their life perspectives, and motivates them.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Presently, the specialists, whose professional activity has a helping nature, are allocated in a unified professional group. The so-called “helping relations” lie at the base of their professional activity – these are the relations when at least one of the sides is intending to contribute to the other side in personal growth, mental development, a better livelihood, the development of maturity, and social interaction (the ability to get along with others) (Rogers, 1994).

People who work helping others, due to insensitivity, close communication with people, and emotional stress, have a high degree of an emotional burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001). There is a negative correlation between burnout and social support in representatives of nearly all professions that relate to helping people professionally. Social support could become a sort of a bumper between stressors, work results, and indicators of a specialist's condition. One can get such support in the framework of educational environment. Conversely, the absence of the possibility of future education and professional growth are the factors that contribute to the emotional burnout among the specialists who work helping others.

## **3. Research Questions**

Specialists, who provide assistance to orphans beginning a new independent life after graduating from an orphanage or from a group homes with a family structure, are considered to be specialists of helping professions (and will be called the support specialists). They provide help with social adaptation, contributing to positive changes in life situations of a graduate. A high risk of professional burnout is very typical for these professionals. It is related not only to the low motivation of orphans-graduates and barely noticeable results of their work, but with limited professional possibilities, there is a lack of necessary

professional environment for their training and support as well as professional burnout prevention. These issues made up the main research question of the current study.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The subject of this article is the description of the result of development (design) and approbation of the educational environmental model for support specialists considering the specifics of their profession.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The concept of environment is related to the presence of a particular coordinated system, the axes that define the possibility of identification of the location of subject in it at each and every moment in time and the further selection of the path of movement. The axis defines the direction of change, at the same time, movement of each axis can be independent of other movements. For educational environment, along with its informative content, it is important to determine not only the direction of measurement of expected changes, but also the means of mastering the space.

The core of educational environment is an educational program, which not only “packs” the study material, but hardens (cements) all the educational environment.

While modeling educational environment, it is important to generate educational content (educational program), to determine the dimension of space and create an organizational form, including tools and norms of its development (Popov, & Tormasin, 2015; Sapargaliyeva, Aralbayeva, Rysbekov, 2015; Taratuhina, & Bleskina, 2016).

#### **6. Findings**

At the base of our model of educational environment for support specialists there is a program called “Accompanying the Graduates of all Forms of Care (including organizations dealing with orphans and those that operate as a family style organization)”. The program was developed in 2015 at the Center of Family and Family policies by the Institute of the Study of Childhood, Family and Education of Russian Academy of Education together with charity fund of child welfare called “Spread the Wings” (Bobyleva, Donenko, Zavidilkina, 2013).

The program includes three blocks: problem-terminology, instrumental-technological, and practical-technical (Bobyleva, & Zavidilkina, 2016). Although, its development isn’t considered to be a linear process, it assumes that the movement will go along the spiral, and when it returns to the place it started, it is studied on a deeper level.

The anticipated results of development programs set the dimension of educational space. By analogy with the mathematical axis coordinate system, the locking measurement direction changes were labeled as x, y, z.

The axis of X - position (replacement - division). In this case, we talk about the changes in professional position of a support specialist toward graduates, associated with the transition from a

strategy of action instead of a graduate, to the strategy of creating conditions for the growth of independence and shared responsibility. We used the ALACT model of reflection (Korthagen, 2017).

The axis of Y – competency (low – high). Changes that are seen here are correlated with gain in knowledge and skills formation (Grégoire, 2015; Shavelson, 2013).

Z axis - affiliation (isolation – community). This axis determines the change associated with the presence of social support and for professional recognition of activities done by support specialists (Popov, & Tormasin, 2015).

The modern level of development of information and telecommunications networks and technologies allows to create virtual learning space as their base, using a variety of services and applications for the interaction between the participants of the educational process (Peters, 1999; Sutton, 2013).

- For our model as organizational forms of interaction we have chosen:
- Mirapolis Virtual Room – webinars;
- Service of Hackpad, that allows sharing documents online to do and check homework;
- Google forms to conduct surveys or questionnaires;
- the portal <http://www.iamhuman.ru/> for communication and exchanging information in an ad hoc group;
- Yandex Disk service for the storage and transmission of educational materials (texts, presentations, films).

To motivate a specialist for additional education we were using both formal stimulus, such as getting a certificate after graduating from the program, and informal, such as personalized interaction within the framework of an individual educational path (Taratuhina, Avdeeva, Mirishli, 2014). In this regard, we decided to provide two sub-environments in our model: apprenticeship space and the space of self-determination.

The developed model of educational environment was introduced at the refresher course in 2016. 42 specialists from 5 regions of the Russian Federation took part in its approbation. The studying of the program was limited in time (3 months), participants were expected to participate in ten webinars, do nine tasks of homework, and prepare for the final test.

## **7. Discussion**

Listed below are the educational results of our specialists who were dividing into three groups in accordance with a given dimensionality of educational environment.

The first group refers to the results of changes in the professional positions of specialists. Answering the question about the results of education, almost 2/3 of specialists (64.1%) marked the statement, “I am understanding better what and how I am doing as a support specialist”; 2/5 of specialists (41%) started to understand principles, goals and results of the job as a support specialist; about 1/3 (35.9%) clarified for themselves the concept of content “support”. The following statements of specialists confirm a change in the position: “There was a doubt in its own right to decide for others”, “I started to look differently at the relationship with graduates (it’s important to ask him/her first what he/she wants)”,

“I understood that it is important to have a dialogue. It’s not only important to talk, but to hear the one who is near you”.

It’s necessary to note that each expert has allocated forms and topics for interaction, the ones that influenced his/her educational outcomes the most, thus denoting his/her educational route. The most popular and productive were webinars about the following topics: “Professional Interaction with the Graduate” (49% of specialists stated that), “7 Criteria for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Support” (44% of specialists), “3 Ways to Increase Graduate’s Independence (39% of specialists). At the same time, each of the nine of the webinars was included in someone's educational route.

The second group of educational results applies to changes in professional competence. To measure it, we asked specialists to rate the adequacy of their knowledge, skills and experience for support and guidance of graduates before and after training. The results are introduced in Table 01.

**Table 01.** The results of self-assessment of professional competence before and after training (% of specialists that stated adequate level of knowledge, skills and experience).

Level of adequacy	Knowledge		Skills		Experience	
	Before training	After training	Before training	After training	Before training	After training
100%	0	0	0	0	0	0
90%	3	15.4	10	20.5	10	17.9
80%	33	46.2	23	43.6	31	28.2
70%	43	17.9	40	17.9	31	28.2
60%	6	15.4	10	12.8	10	12.8
50%	10	5.1	10	2.6	6	7.7
40%	0	0	6	2,6	6	0
30%	3	0	0	0	5	5.1
20%	0	0	0	0	0	0
10%	0	0	0	0	0	0

Comparing the responses of experts before and after training, we can say that after the training the specialists tend to evaluate the adequacy of the level of their knowledge, skills and experience of the application higher. Thus, the proportion of experts that assess their knowledge on a maximum level of 90% increased by 5 times from 3% to 15%. The proportion of experts, evaluating their skills at the highest level of 90% increased by 2 times (from 10% to 21%). The same growth (by almost 2 times, from 10% to 18%) is typical for specialists’ self-rating of their experience in knowledge and skills.

The lack of evaluation at the level of 100% can be regarded as a specialist understanding the possibility of further educational growth. More than half (59%) of experts believe that they got concrete tools for their work. Prior to the end of the program, two-thirds of the students (38.5%) started to use skills and tools obtained during the exploration program in their work. And every fifth student (20.5%) was able to achieve results in the work with a specific graduate due to training.

The third group of educational outcomes is associated with the formation of community, which provides the opportunity to speak, to share experiences, to learn the opinion of colleagues, thereby obtaining professional recognition. Most of the experts (58%) noted the value of professional interaction

with other specialists, joint decision of educational problems, and the possibility to hold different positions during this interaction (listener, expert speaker).

The formation of the community also contributed to a friendly atmosphere, involvement in the process, and the ability to receive supervision from experienced professionals. In this regard, we note emergence of the listeners' "positive attitude to change the principles of its work, and the desire to work in a new way", "greater confidence in achieving the result".

## 8. Conclusion

Summing up the development and approbation of the model of educational environment for specialists of so-called helping professions, we came to the following conclusions:

- combining a variety of public services and free technology, you can create an educational environment in accordance with existing objectives and tasks;
- the current level of development of information and telecommunication technologies significantly reduces the restrictions on entry into the educational environment for professionals of different age groups;
- in spite of the different professional content, educational environment that is being created for specialists of helping professions, should be focused on the formation of communities, providing social support and reducing the risk of burnout;
- the combination of a single educational environment provides the best educational results in the opportunities to generate new knowledge, the formation of practical skills, and professional self-determination and reflection;
- educational environment for professionals of helping professions must be open in terms of opportunities for making new content by all participants of the educational process, presenting multiple views on the same issue or practice.

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