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The Phenomenon of Russian Gerontogenesis: Historical Experience and Development Strategy

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Abstract

Due to the aging of the population and the increase in the retirement age, the strategic task of the Russian State is to preserve the older generation as an active part of modern society. The person is focused on such a significant resource of the general and professional development as the willingness to adequately respond to numerous unpredictable and often spontaneous changes in the socio-cultural sphere in a fairly short period of time. The reference to retro and perspective of gerontological education allows us to characterize essential features of its phenomenology, and on analysis of the historical dynamics of their establishment and development.

The experiment was focused on the evaluation of the results obtained during the long-term work of the Institute of the Third Age of Smolensk State University. The research data shows that the organization of the pedagogical process with retro-students should be built taking into account the orientation to the main invariant components of gerontological education: axiological, ontological and epistemological. Thus, our retrospective and prospective analysis of gerontology education shows that contemporary Russian gerontological education as the final link of continuing education is today a flexible, dynamic educational component of the entire gerontological infrastructure, harmoniously integrating into the reform of the entire educational system in Russia. However, such optimization of education must be based on educational and sociocultural traditions of the pedagogical process.

Keywords: senior citizen, gerontological education, continuing education, 'Third Age Institution', traditional educational technologies, innovative educational technologies.

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Introduction

In the context of the modern radical restructuring of the system of higher professional education (as a special cross-cultural social institution), there is an urgent need to expand the actual field of its implementation. This process initiates ensuring the continuity of education as one of the leading directions of modernization, providing its further sustainable development. In this regard, as one of the significant trends in reforming the system of higher professional training, its targeted diversification should be positioned. Today it is obvious that due to this, higher education can become more receptive to the existing diversity of demands of both society and a differentiated economy.

In recent decades, the importance of matching both general and professional training to the real needs of society as a whole and of each individual has been emphasized. In this regard, the awareness of the place, role and main functions of education in modern conditions is being transformed (Decree of the Government, 2017). There is a real need to ensure its greater openness and flexibility. Modern researchers claim that the education system should be adequate to the updated economy and production, that is: have flexibility and nonlinearity of organizational forms of education; include processes of obtaining and updating information in all types of pedagogical activities; rely on a person's willingness to be active, creative and initiate changes in their everyday, cultural and professional activities.

Purpose and objectives of the study

In this regard, in the context of our stated scientific problem, the purpose and objectives of the study are to:

- analyze the theoretical and methodological foundations for the processing of the phenomenon of Lifelong Learning/continuous education;
- reveal the place and status of gerontological education as a specific element and direction of both specially organized and spontaneous activities in the modern educational field;
- characterize the multifactorial nature of gerontological education in terms of assessment of its main structural components;
- identify a set of leading principles, basic laws, as well as characteristic trends of their development in modern conditions;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the main directions of gerontological development on the example of the functioning of the Institute of the Third Age.

In general, the formulation of the educational system of retro- students in the context of determining the prospects for their professional development and personal self-determination in the course of professional training has significant potential and determines the need for the formation of the declared phenomenon in the unity of the structural components identified by us. From this viewpoint, our analysis of the specific definition of "gerontological education" allows us to minimize the existing contradictions of interaction with students of late adulthood, including reducing the negative aspects of the organization of the process of their professional and personal self-realization. Let us explain this thesis on the example of our experimental research in the Institute of the Third Age at the Smolensk State University (SmolSU).

Literature review

The reference to the normative documentation defining the organization of work in modern higher education allows us to state that lifelong learning is considered today as “a process of growth of the educational (general and professional) potential of the individual throughout life, based on the use of the system of state and public institutions and in accordance with the needs of the individual and society. The need for lifelong learning is due to the progress of science and technology and the wide use of innovative technologies” (Kononygina, 2004). It should be particularly noted that the classics of philosophy, psychology and pedagogics in the 19th century emphasized the necessity of purposeful education of a person at all stages of his life.

Today, the resort to both retrospective and potential perspectives of gerontological education allows us to describe the essential features of its phenomenon, evaluating it in the following three-way time structure: past - present - future. It is the relevant historical and socio-cultural projections update the experience of research on gerontology education, analyzing, transforming and actively using it in the context of the modernization of the contemporary system of continuing education. It is appropriate here to refer to a well-known and topical saying: "The wisdom of existence is economical – everything new in it is sewn out of old things." Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that it is within the framework of crisis phenomena that "the historical memory of the people is awakened and there is an urgent need to preserve and increase the already established general cultural and national traditions in all the spheres of the spiritual life of society, and especially in the system of education” (Onishchenko, Romanyuk, & Sitarov, 2002).

Particularly, the relevant historical and socio-cultural projections allow updating the experience of gerontological education, analyzing, transforming and actively using it in the context of modernization of the modern system of continuous education of the people of the respective age group. Thus, there is either a purposeful or spontaneous revision of the conceptual foundations of the social policy caused by external political, socio-cultural and economic factors, as well as the choice of a global or local/regional strategy for the development of society. On this basis, the need to modernize the educational sphere is accepted, taking into account the set of recognized values and traditions. Therefore, we can conclude that the actual institution of education of the mature and senior population in Russia is currently at the stage of its institutional formulation.

Such a requirement was included in the description of the term "pedagogical anthropology" by K. D. Ushinsky. It meant the science, the main function of which is to ensure the improvement, including self-improvement of a person throughout his life, on the basis of leading philosophical principles (Petrunina, 2004). On this basis, according to modern researchers, the author positions his approach, due to which the education at any stage of human life should be evaluated "not as a collection of ready-made rules or speculative metaphysical constructions, but as a set of laws of education, generalization of pedagogical experience, based on the application of philosophical methods, the study of human mental life and taking into account the historical development and characteristics of the people” (Kruglikova, 2004). Today it is noted that K. D. Ushinsky sees the essence of his pedagogical anthropology that it should "become the methodological basis of pedagogics, that is, it will allow to formulate certain principles, goals and tasks of teaching activity, evaluate methods and means of learning according to the subject of pedagogics. Pedagogical anthropology as a combination of ideas about a human being, which is the basis of a specific pedagogical theory, will allow us to study the nature of pedagogical knowledge, its methods and means, to study pedagogics as a special cognitive activity” (Petrunina, 2004, p. 24).

In this regard, in our research, we agree with the view of Petrunina (2004) and we propose to analyze pedagogical anthropology as an integral information system about the nature of a human being, the process of targeted education, training, development and improvement, which can become the basis for any pedagogical theory, including gerontological pedagogics, which should follow the principle of anthropologization in the focused organization of practical activities. In this context, anthropologization should act as one of the leading ideological and methodological principles in assessing this phenomenon in the field of continuous education. At the same time, it can be stated that the assessment of its phenomenology is clearly insufficient. It seems to us that we should present a multi-dimensional and ordered analysis of both the retrospective and the perspective for the development of continuous education.

Thus, the concept was recorded in the normative documents of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1968, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the program documentation of the European Union (EU), as well as in collections of international conferences: "Lifelong learning: continuing education for sustainable development", "Adult Education in the context of Lifelong learning", "Adult Lifelong learning", including an international forum held for many years at the "Institute of Pedagogic Education and Adult education" of the RAE (Saint Petersburg). They reflected the leading positions of the global conceptual paradigm which is based on the principle of continuity of education.

Methodology

Therefore, the idea of continuity of education today (at the beginning of the 21st century) is the dominant vector of educational reforms and one of the leading research areas. The continuity of education is considered as a mega-functional historical and cultural phenomenon and is interpreted from different perspective positions. It is based on the following statement: "adult education never ends". Thus, Sorokin (2011) states that even "at the present stage of its development, Russian gerontology is not only devoid consistency, but also has virtually no scientific basis. The direction of its development is determined by the geometric sum of three forces, three multidirectional vectors: the needs of society, the motives of educational activities of senior citizens, and ... unfortunately, we have to state that today, under the influence of these forces, gerontological education is moving further away from solving actual social problems" (p.89).

At the same time, the results of the research by Savina (2015, p.59) indicate that "in the current socio-economic situation in the world, the idea of lifelong learning (or further LLL) becomes a key problem. The acquisition of new knowledge and competencies is a condition for the employee to meet the pace of changes, his understanding of the world around him and comfortable living in a changing reality". On this basis, modern scientific works position the idea of a multi-aspect system of gerontological education, which includes several areas: one of them involves the preparation of representatives of different age groups for the period of advanced age in the context of both formal and informal education. The next one is related to the purposeful adaptation of elder people to retirement.

This is associated with "ensuring the availability of the following systems of formal education: advanced training, training and retraining of personnel, obtaining a new profession, etc. At this level, there are courses, consulting agencies, specialized exchanges for retraining and employment, psychological, therapeutic and social programs that provide solutions to existing life problems. At the same time, we can distinguish a tendency that involves informal education of senior people who are looking for opportunities for their personal development and self-development, as well as seeking to continue their professional training" (Kononygina, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to consolidate with the opinion of

Smantser (2016) and state the fact that there is an urgent need to create adequate didactic resources for organizing pedagogical work with people with limited psychophysiological abilities and having various diseases.

In general, our analysis of the traditions of formulation of Russian gerontological education suggests that: the need for training and education of representatives of mature/elderly age was formed in Russia quite quickly. This trend is confirmed by the urgent need for scientific research in this area. Information about the evolution of gerontological education was drawn both from foreign works and from our own research of Russian gerontologists. In this regard, it can be stated that such material was offered in accordance with a specific concept of the author's analysis and was designed exclusively descriptive, without the use of evaluative judgments, as well as without taking into account innovative approaches to the formulation of gerontological pedagogics as a specific scientific field. Such peculiarities indicate that the focus was only on a consistent presentation of facts and characteristics of individual events related to pedagogical science and practical organization of educational work with the elder generation (students of so-called "third age") in Western Europe and Russia. The appeal to the interpretation of this definition in the context of building an etymological sequence of such characteristics as education, continuing education/lifelong learning and gerontological education indicates that gerontological education is presented by modern researchers as an essential component of modern global and regional/state gerontological policy. Its significance is assessed "from the point of view of creating and expanding opportunities for senior citizens, their further development and self-development, for productive activities for themselves, families, society and the state" (Sidorchuk, 2015).

At the same time, the study of modern scientific research in this area shows that such institutions of the third age on the basis of higher education institutions operate today in many local regions. The researchers note that "the most successful educational projects were created at the bases of Tyumen State Oil and Gas University, Kazan State University, Novosibirsk State Technical University, and the Baltic Immanuel Kant Federal University, Tomsk State University, Mari State University, etc. While most higher education institutions teach retro-students in separate modules and areas that take into account the specific educational preferences of senior citizens, several universities, such as Smolensk State University and Far Eastern Federal University, have taken the path of integrated lifelong learning" (Sidorchuk, 2019). Thus, our analysis shows that the organization of the pedagogical process in educational institutions for people of the "third age" should be built with a focus on the main invariant components of gerontological education, with which it is formed and appears as a single integral system.

As such, in our opinion, we should distinguish axiological, ontological and epistemological components. Thus, the axiological component determines the value of retro-students' learning of relevant educational information. This process involves focusing on the formation of a unified system of socio-cultural and professional values within the educational process. This allows us to make the educational content more conceptual, aimed at stimulating the cognitive interest of mature students, enriching their professional training, as well as developing their personal potential. The ontological component involves the modernization of educational content, which is mastered by students of the "third age" while organizing of educational activity. At the same time, the epistemological component requires a clear organization of educational activities, taking into account the active use of a complex of associative-mnemonic techniques that allow to optimize the cognitive activity of representatives of this age group.

For the historical perspective on the organization of educational activities involving senior citizens, the main structural components should be identified, which must form the basis of the analysis: the characteristics of gerontology

educational institutions, as well as the study of didactic traditions related to the organization of the pedagogical process in view of the age profile of its participants. The aim of the study is to track the dynamics of motivational approaches, teaching and methodological content, educational needs and expectations of retro-students to create optimal psychological and pedagogical conditions for their inclusion into a single educational poly-subjective space contributing to senior citizens' focused personal development, physical and mental health optimization, professional potential maintenance.

As part of the organization and formulation of the empirical part of our experiment, it was supposed to track the dynamics of motivational approaches, learning and methodical content, educational needs and expectations of retro-students to create optimal psychological and pedagogical conditions for their inclusion in a single educational multi-subject space that promotes purposeful personal development, optimizing physical and mental health, and preserving the professional potential of senior citizens.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set:

- to analyze the results for 8 years of the practical experience of the Institute of the Third Age
- to track the dynamics of motivational approaches of retro-students
- to evaluate the dynamics of educational content, educational needs and expectations of retro-students
- to study the leading areas of formulation and organization of the gerontological unit on the basis of a higher educational institution
- to consider the leading trends and potential prospects for the development of Russian gerontological education

We used the following methods during organizing the work: theoretical (modeling or projection); diagnostic (questionnaire; testing); empirical (study of the comparative experience of the Institutions of the Third Age and gerontological educational organizations of the Russian Federation over the past 8 years of work); method of informative presentation of the obtained data, method of analysis. The study was conducted on the basis of the Institute of the Third Age of SmolSU.

Stages of the research

Stage 1: comparative analysis and generalization of the work experience in dynamics of our structural division for 8 years, in terms of assessing the satisfaction of all participants with the conditions of the organization of the educational process and their motivational position.

Stage 2: research aimed at diagnosing the quality of psychophysiological well-being of retro students and assessing the level of their adaptation to the new conditions of the educational space of the declared scientific and educational center of SmolSU.

Stage 3: assessment of the prospects for the development of Russian gerontological education on the example of the overall strategy of modernization of the Institute in SmolSU.

Results

A comparative project "The role of gerontological education in my life" was implemented as a part of the Institute's activities and the organization of a complex procedure for monitoring the organization of its work. The comparative study involved 100 retro-students studying at different courses, which allowed us to track and evaluate the most significant changes and their dynamics. Retro-students (*age structure of respondents*: 55-60 years – 10%, 61-70 years – 70%, 71-80 years – 20%; *gender characteristics*: 90% – female, 10% – male; *educational level*: 80% – with higher education) studied under the bachelor's degree system, consistently passing from one course to another.

In the first year, the basic educational program, including the basics of medical knowledge and computer literacy, as well as active cultural and leisure activities, became mandatory for all. Then, by consistently organized monitoring at the end of each academic year, we took into account the educational preferences of senior students and adjusted the educational program for the new academic year. Over 8 years of training they had mastered a whole complex of separate elective courses and modules: basics of Orthodoxy and the history of their native land, dance-therapy, foreign language, su-jok, basics of law literacy, psychology of positive aging, prevention of Alzheimer's disease and maintenance of cognitive processes, etc.

At the first stage, we evaluated gerontological education as a significant element of modern higher education from the perspective of consumers themselves (retro-students), based on the inclusion of the following structural blocks (motivational, content, psychological) in this monitoring procedure. Let us consider and present its results in more detail.

The motivational block contained the following main questions:

- "Why did you decide to start studying at our Institute?"
- "Would you like to change yourself and why?"
- "What did your training at the Institute of the Third Age give you?"

The answers to the first question of the first year of training were mainly about getting new competencies and expanding the space for communication: "to get new knowledge, develop oneself, the opportunity to learn with your peers, make a variety in your own life...". At the same time, the answers of the students of the last years were supplemented with the following: "to get psychological advice, keep oneself at the level of modern life, the opportunity to get another profession...". More than 80% of respondents of the first year, as a rule, gave a negative answer to the second question. In the last year of training, more than 90% would like to change themselves, "in order to live more interesting, to catch up for something, to understand, to keep up with the changing world... I realized that I just need it, it's never too late to improve, not to be in an information vacuum, to live here and now...".

At the same time, we received the following answers to the last question: for beginners to study in the first year, the main thing is a push to search for new information in the Internet or books, which brings order to the rhythm of their everyday life, makes them plan, helps to develop physically and psychologically, gives an opportunity to communicate in informal circumstances with enthusiastic people of different generations. For the respondents who were studying in the last years, the focus of their education changed significantly to communication and self-realization in the socio-cultural

environment surrounding the individual. The opportunity to meet interesting, competent and positive people becomes significant for them. The survey participants emphasized: "I want to live more actively for a long time, education gives hope for positive changes in life", "it helps to reach the top on my own feet and with a wise head." They noticed that the Institute helps them to rise, gives them support and inspires confidence in their abilities. In particular, most of the participants replied that it is "important for them to see the same co-thinkers nearby, for whom the age is not the limit of opportunities, but the acquisition of personal freedom and pushed life horizons".

Thus, it can be observed that the development of professional skills and competencies gradually come second with age, but self-realization and personal growth remains relevant, so there is a need for active development of their physical and intellectual resources, as well as the spiritual sphere according to their powers and capabilities. This way we have recorded clearly positive dynamics in the system of axiological attitudes of retro students, taking into account the needs of modern Russian society and their readiness to actively participate in social life at the level of their nearest environment and their area.

The content block assumed an assessment of students' educational preferences. At the same time, during the first year, the Institute's training was limited to 3-4 basic subjects necessary for retro-students (basics of medical self-help, basics of computer literacy, cultural and leisure activities). At the same time, in the last years of training, we began to focus on deepening the content of the educational areas preferred by students. In this connection, a significant positive dynamics of qualitative changes based on previously obtained basic knowledge was revealed for each of them. Thus, on the basis of the studied basics of medical self-help, additional blocks like "Skills of a professional nurse" were opened for retro students themselves and their closest surroundings. The mastering of health technologies has also continued due to the emergence of a new health and educational direction as "Prevention of cognitive disorders and Alzheimer's disease", etc.

In general, we have recorded a trend according to which the content and methodological part of gerontological education is also constantly changing, taking into account the current needs of the most active part of the elder generation of students. In this regard, in the near future we plan to open the following educational areas: "Basics of volunteer activity", "Environmental cooperation", "Correct Russian language", "English language", etc., which will ensure the maintenance of the intellectual potential of older people, as well as become the basis for the prevention of cognitive disorders and Alzheimer's disease. In this context, the main direction for our transition to the study of terminals and the uniqueness of the functioning of cell phones and various gadgets was the consistent learning of computer literacy. The active digitalization of education for the elderly has become one of the most popular areas, which includes mastering not only the skills of interacting with a personal computer, tablets, terminals, but also cell phones with their new functions and potential opportunities for virtual communication.

Moreover, the digitalization of gerontological education itself allowed to determine the most demanded problem of psychological and pedagogical support of the retro-students because of their age and cognitive impairment, and this requires training of personnel and tutors of gerontological digital area, including the students themselves. At the same time, the direction related to cultural and leisure activities was expanded by us by including additional courses and workshops on the study of the history of the native land, the basics of Orthodox culture, the originality of the national culture of representatives of various nationalities living today in the Smolensk region and its cultural center – the city of Smolensk.

In addition, as part of the second stage of the research, we conducted a targeted longitudinal psychological study aimed at diagnosing the quality of psychophysiological well-being of retro-students and assessing their level of adaptation to new living conditions, including training at the Institute of the Third Age of SmolSU and active participation in the social life of the University for the entire period of functioning of this division. Obtained questionnaire on self-assessment of cognitive processes, emotional and physical well-being, in the course of using the complex of diagnostic methods (Mini-Mental State Examination-MMSE); that is "Geriatric depression scale", drawing techniques allow after the appropriate analysis of respondents' answers to 3 structural units (physical health, mental health, cognitive processes) to highlight the presence of the distinct trends.

To the question "Has your mental state and emotional well-being changed after starting training?", we received the following answers: 82% of respondents noticed a positive dynamics in their emotional state. In particular, these improvements were manifested in the fact that they became more sociable; they had new life goals, although before the training, they constantly had a negative attitude, and 90% had low self-esteem. Training at the Institute increased self-esteem to an average and high level for 70% of retro students ("Flower" drawing method). Before classes at the Institute of the Third Age, the percentage of retro students (regardless of the chosen subject) who were on the border of the normal level of depression reached 37%. After a few years of continuous training at the Institute of the Third Age, 100% of older students, regardless of the direction of educational activity, do not have obvious acute manifestations of depression, training improved the emotional state for the most of the students (Sidorchuk, 2018). Herewith, to preserve the emotional well-being and mental health of the elderly, they were offered to master positive thinking programs. Improving the emotional state of retro-students is associated with such educational areas as cultural and leisure activities, the basics of Orthodox culture and dance therapy.

We also received the following answers to the question: "How did your physical condition change after you started training?" 62% noted its improvement, indicating that headaches have decreased, they have become more mobile, more energy appeared. Retro students associate the improving of their physical health with such disciplines as the basics of medical self-help, su-jok, and dance therapy. These disciplines should be given special attention, since the problems of mental and physical health in connection with the polymobility of older people is of particular importance. All this has a direct impact on the level of their adaptation to the new conditions, as well as ensuring the optimization of their adequate integration in the context of their new social status.

The results of the *study of cognitive processes* showed that 70% of respondents noted memory impairment in their first year, and 33% had pre-demental disorders. In this regard, it was decided to include information and diagnostic module "related to the maintenance of cognitive processes and prevention of Alzheimer's disease and allowing older people to independently diagnose and correct a violation of cognitive processes, forming health-preserving motivation and stereotypes" in the block of educational programs on health-preserving development (Reshetova, Kiseleva, Gerasimova, & Nikitina, 2014). At the same time, a comparative analysis of the influence of various educational directions on the level of maintenance of cognitive processes allowed us to rank these educational disciplines. In this connection, the best way to correct the violation of cognitive processes is to use dance therapy or a foreign language, moreover, the training should not be a short-term like 3-month courses, but should last at least a year, preferably several years (Sidorchuk, 2018).

In addition, it can be stated that gerontological education is becoming an important component of the Russian state policy, which should ensure the preservation of residual working activity of senior people, and this will significantly increase their intellectual potential, including the rapid digitization of medical and psychological support for students of this age group. Such work will require deepening and expanding the block of educational and health technologies in the educational process of senior citizens in the context of higher school activities.

At the same time, the results of a study on the development of professional retraining programs for people of pre-retirement age showed that 80% of respondents in this age group refused to free professional training (retraining), 13% want to improve their skills in an existing profession, and only 6% are ready to work in a new profession. This requires constant monitoring of professional, educational and psychological services in the labor market, expanding the market for vacancies in desired professions, strengthening information support, advertising and including mandatory computer literacy training in the educational process. Motivation for professional retraining and its inclusion in the chain of lifelong learning contributes to the process of social adaptation of senior people, improves cognitive, emotional and motivational areas, reduces the level of loneliness and depression by expanding the circle of communication and social connections.

In general, gerontological education in the new conditions should include "wellness component with the unit of health-educational technologies to improve and preserve the physical and mental health of elder people and cognitive component with block of technologies, preserving intellectual potential of elder people" (Zhukov, 2007). In this regard, it is necessary to introduce effective medical support for working senior people, and this requires additional costs for medical examinations and maintenance of HLS. That is why the system of functioning of the psychological service should include the work on the development and implementation of a whole range of health and educational technologies to support the everyday life of senior people, which requires to establish everywhere medical departments and offices of geriatric care. At the same time, the psychological component of gerontological education should be responsible for increasing the level of stress resistance, self-esteem, confidence, flexibility of people of pre-retirement age. This is confirmed by the results of research by Yermolaeva (2010), who emphasizes the fact that the purposeful "organization of psychological and pedagogical support should take into account the individual characteristics of gerontogenesis, the type of aging and the peculiarities of personal self-determination of elder people".

Thus, summing up the results of our research stages, we can state that the modern Russian gerontological education as a final link of lifelong learning is today a flexible, dynamically developing educational component of the entire gerontological infrastructure, harmoniously fitting into the reform of the entire education system in Russia. However, such optimization of education should be based on educational and socio-cultural traditions of the pedagogical process.

The third stage of the research involved the analysis of the perspectives for the development of regional gerontological education on the example of the Institute of the Third Age on the basis of the social and psychological center of SmolSU. We have carried out a comprehensive assessment of existing today and implemented in recent years of some innovative approaches in gerontological education. From this point of view, the emergence of various online services in Internet networks that provide assistance to the elderly by giving them up-to-date information about existing educational and information services in various regions of the Russian Federation is of particular importance. However, optimizing the use of these information resources is not possible without addressing the problem of increasing the level of computer literacy of senior people. Today in Russia, no more than 25% of the elderly population actively use various technical

means, including a computer. At the same time, today almost 100% of public services are provided through Internet resources, so digitalization of elder people is one of the most important tasks of the government. That is why the modern development of digital technologies and their penetration into all areas of everyday life challenges retro students to adapt to the digital space, which requires special psychological support and tutoring of senior people.

At the same time, the need to give institutional training for providing additional educational services to elder people should be considered as another relevant direction in the development of the phenomenon of gerontological education. The comparative experience of the Institute of the Third Age of SmolSU and other similar institutions of higher education allowed us to assess the dynamics of the structure of existing gerontological units. If at the dawn of gerontological education it began with monthly courses in certain educational areas, now full-fledged institutes and universities of the third age have been opened in all regions of Russia, and in the future it is planned to open multifunctional gerontological departments on the basis of leading state universities. Such structural units within a single execution of gerontological education space, will comprehensively deal with training of retro- students, providing them with the required competencies for personal and professional development and self-development and professional retraining of people approaching retirement age within the Pension reform.

Discussions

Moreover, a variety of innovative geriatric educational projects existing today, as well as the use of innovative technologies in the framework of implemented an integral concept of gerontological education in the Russian Federation, will become an active mean of preserving the social and labour activity of senior people, will form a positive attitude towards their potential opportunities and resources and significantly improve the quality of their life. In addition, the formulation of separate structural divisions of gerontological orientation within the framework of higher school activities allows us to solve a whole range of current problems: "first, the availability of personnel, scientific, methodological and material-technical bases within higher educational institutions allows to make the educational process at gerontological faculties and Institutes of the Third Age the most productive and full-fledged; second, conditions are created for joint activities of different generations: young students and retro-students" (Yermolaeva, 2010, p. 9). Due to their organization, the problem of intergenerational interaction is partially solved. Let us explain this thesis in more detail. As shown by the data obtained in the course of studying the effectiveness of intergenerational interaction (conducted on the basis of SmolSU), almost 100% of both retro students themselves and young students participating in the survey, gave a positive assessment of the possibility of their further communication and joint activities in a unified educational environment. At the same time, as a promising direction for the development of gerontological education, we can highlight the establishing of gerontological structural divisions of Universities that will not only train retro-students, but also will train personnel to work with them in the following professional areas: education, social services and health.

Moreover, according to current data, 85% of retro-students believe that older people need psychological support for all educational activities, and this is an important component of creating a safe educational environment. Due to the increase of the retirement age, the modern complex of educational technologies for health-saving development based on the third-age institutions today needs to include information and diagnostic unit for the maintenance of cognitive processes and prevention of Alzheimer's disease, which allows older people to independently diagnose and correct such disorders in themselves and their closest environment. Such blocks should become a part of an educational module on the formation of positive thinking, preserving the intellectual potential of elder generation.

At the same time, the modern space of gerontological education should be expanded through the implementation of projects for the development of so-called "silver volunteerism" and professional mentoring. Today, the most promising areas for this type of activity are: projects that involve ensuring the safety of life of senior citizens based on the prevention of a complex of major diseases of this age group, as well as projects related to the activation of social activities of elderly people with limited mobility. In the whole, the appeal to this experience of organizing professional mentoring with the involvement of retro-students should be considered as an important resource for creating mutually beneficial cooperation between representatives of different generations, as well as optimizing the work to increase the social significance and prestige of various professional areas, as well as the active involvement of senior people in the socio-cultural and educational activities of modern Universities.

Conclusion

In summary, we can make a general conclusion that today, in the beginning of the 21st century, we can highlight professional training, organized on the basis of realization of comprehensive special programs related to training and retraining of senior citizens as a leading and promising directions of development of Russian gerontological education; the implementation of health-educational technologies aimed at improving and maintaining of physical and mental health of retro-students; psychological training related to increasing the level of development of such personal characteristics as the level of stress resistance, confidence, flexibility, as well as self-esteem of students of pre-retirement age; psychological and pedagogical support and tutoring, responsible for the inclusion of low-mobility and remote groups of the elderly population in the educational space: mandatory digitalization of the educational space of senior citizens.

In addition, the relevance of the problem of modernizing the actual pedagogical process for teaching the elderly, as well as the organization of training for "gerontology teachers" (teachers who specialize in the training of senior generation students), also the implementation of psychological, pedagogical and legal support for the actual educational work is noted. At the same time, there is a need to create appropriate material and technical conditions that take into account the age specifics of retro-students and provide them with a comfortable and safe social environment at the University. Therefore, the appeal to the retrospective and potential perspective of gerontological education allows us to characterize the essential features of its phenomenology, and aims at a comprehensive analysis of the most relevant components of such a phenomenon, including historical dynamics of their establishment, formation and development.

The creation of the concept of security of the educational environment for the elderly requires comprehensive scientific research, which should be linked to an adequate analysis of the various aspects of training them in the conditions of realization of educational standards for higher and additional education. We have confirmed the fact that with the correct organization of the educational process, 90% of retro students agree that education allows them to take a worthy place in the society, provides self-realization and self-esteem.

In this regard, we believe that combining both classical/traditional and innovative educational technologies with the active involvement of online services and mastering the basics of computer literacy, as well as institutional/non-institutional additional educational services for senior citizens, an active organization of volunteer activities and inter-generational mentoring will allow us to harmoniously combine all the best from the past and present, which will create conditions for the manifestation of positive results of continuing professional education in general. The diversity of the presented forms and means of gerontological education within the framework of the unified concept of gerontological

education will become an essential basis for strengthening the Russian system of education of retro-students, helping them to actively adapt to the conditions of modern life in the 21st century. Therefore, the organization of the modern system of gerontological education should also be integrated into the educational system of our country as a whole and its regions. This makes it possible for the phenomenon of gerontological education to become an important and integral part of the system of continuous professional training, which, in turn, will ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the LLL (lifelong learning) concept and allow elderly citizens to learn and develop throughout their lives.

Thus, a retro- and prospective analysis of gerontological education as one of the structural elements of the system of continuous education conducted by us, shows that active awareness of the demand of the society for constant development and improvement, the emancipation of consciousness and creative thinking, both general and personal experience determines the need to assess the available intellectual and spiritual heritage including the field of gerontopedagogics, which, in turn, becomes a methodological imperative of reforming gerontological education. This allows us to state the fact that gerontological education should be considered as a syncretic phenomenon, as a dynamic process of awareness by the adult / senior population of the entire system of material, socio-cultural and spiritual values that are evaluated as the basis for the recognition of their own nature and culture as a whole by each individual.

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