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## EFFECT OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGISTS' MENTAL EXPERIENCE ON THEIR PARENTAL COMPETENCE

**M. P. Gusakova**

**PhD. (Psychology), Assist. Prof. at Odessa National I. I. Mechnikov University,  
Odessa, Ukraine**

E-mail: [psyspiro@te.net.ua](mailto:psyspiro@te.net.ua)

### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of various components of psychologists' mental experience (ME) on their parental competence (PC) when dealing with children of primary school age. We have distinguished three factors – professional attitude, professional competence and professional learning, dividing each into a number of components relating to explicit and implicit experience. For instance, explicit representation of professional attitude in terms of communication with children is a psychologist's self-assessment scale, and implicit representation is a degree of openness of cognitive position as willingness to solve problems. Explicit representation of psychologist's professional competence is his/her work experience in his/her major (school psychologist), and implicit representation is reflexivity of cognitive style built by competent professionals. Professional learning for psychologists takes two forms: explicit learning, which is a conscious acquisition of knowledge and skills through trainings and seminars, and implicit learning, which is undirected, for example, through research and writing articles. It has turned out that explicit and implicit components of mental experience have a different effect on such parameters of psychologists' parental competence as feedback efficiency, level of feedback detail and predictability of feedback usefulness. In other words, we have established that professional mental experience of psychologists may shape up their parental competence, making it both high and low. It is important to know that implicit (and often unconscious) components of mental experience have as much effect as its explicit components. We believe that study of implicit components of professional learning may contribute to improvement of psychologists' professional training and development of a professional's mature personality.

**Key words:** parental competence, mental experience, psychologists, explicit and implicit components.

## Introduction

Experience is a foundation for shaping up competence in professional learning and development. Such competence is based on the person's general intellectual development and is an individual pattern for cataloguing knowledge involved in efficient decision making process in specific situations (Shmargun, 2013; Gelfman & Kholodnaya, 2006).

Communication competence is one of the types of personal competence. Studying effects of experience and its structure proves to be important for understanding and organization of communication learning process in its two components: explicit and implicit learning. We believe that explicit learning of competent communication occurs in the course of psychologists' professional training in institutions of higher education and extended education on seminars and trainings. Implicit communication learning is possible in the course of the psychologist's practical work and daily activities through imitation and situated learning.

We agree with K. Sementsova's statement that "life experience and professional experience are interconnected because the learner shapes up professional experience based on his/her personal experience. At the same time peculiarities of personal experience (underlying emotions, perception of mistakes, successes achieved in the past experience) will determine peculiarities of acquisition of new professional experience" (2012).

Experience is not just the past (situations one lived through), which comes down to acquired skills, knowledge and expertise and is limited to practices of sensory and empirical perception of reality. According to M. Kholodnaya, mental experience contains the past as acquired mental structures, the present as new mental formations in intellectual activity, and the future as anticipation of consequences and forecast of events (2002). M. Kholodnaya writes about "extraction" of experience from one's life occurrences.

To distinguish such aspect of experience as its "extractedness" from the person's professional and personal life, we should refer to the notion of the person's mental experience. Personal and professional experience are interpreted and adopted by the person to varying extents, and transfer from occurrences (extraction) to mental experience (as the person's acquired resource) is possible only when professional and personal experience change mental formations (structures, spaces and representations). Such extracted or mental experience can have an effect on completeness and nature of acquisition of new experience, i.e. on its enhancement. According to M. Kholodnaya, mental experience contributes to multifaceted cognition of the external world and determines specific peculiarities of one's intellectual activity.

Since mental experience is a complex integral factor, it covers all fields of human activities – from cognitive to emotional. M. Kholodnaya distinguishes the following levels in the structure of mental experience: cognitive, metacognitive and intentional. Peculiarities of arrangement of these three levels of experience determine such properties in persons as convergent and divergent abilities, implicit and explicit learning ability and cognitive styles (Kholodnaya, 2004). Mental experience as a special mental reality determines not only properties of one's intellectual activity, but also personal qualities and peculiarities of social interactions. That is why we are at liberty to expect that mental experience has a direct effect on all types of personal competence, including competence in communication with children.

Individually specific mental structures, mental space connected with context building and mental representations determine distinctiveness and efficiency of behaviour and activity. M. Kholodnaya believes that these mental formations are shaped up in the course of individual development as a result of active interaction between the person and the world. Moreover, mental representations are built on the basis of the available world image and take part in understanding and interpretation of other people's behaviour, formation and maintenance of self-image (Petrenko, 1988).

In other words, mental experience in the structure of parental competence is a determining factor in all three mental formations, developed in psychologist's personality under the impact of his/her professional and life experience, and having effect on acquisition of new professional and life experience.

M. Kholodnaya writes about enhancement of mental experience in schoolchildren. Enhancement of mental experience in adults is also possible through self-education and research (Gelfman & Kholodnaya, 2006).

Experience and mental experience are not merely formations with distinguishable structure. They are dynamic formations, since structural elements of mental experience may have two different states: explicit and implicit. Reorganization, differentiation, categorization and similar processes occur at the level of mental experience, depending on peculiarities of a specific situation and internal environment (knowledge, personal qualities and states) (Gelfman & Kholodnaya, 2006; Lobanov, 2014). We can surmise that these processes and mechanisms may have a varying degree of explicitness/implicitness. That is why we believe it is feasible to introduce the notion of the person's explicit and implicit mental experience.

In psychology we witness a growing scope of research concerning implicit and explicit mental states: knowledge, attitudes, stereotypes, learning, representations, memory, attention, perception and emotions (Ushakov, 1997; Moroshkina & Ivanchei, 2012; Shchebetenko & Artamonov, 2012; Shestakov et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2001; Gendlin, 2003; Gyurak et al., 2011; Schiepe-Tiska, 2013). In the wider academic context, we come across notions of explicit and implicit author and reader, explicit and implicit meanings, statements and approaches, implicit and explicit modeling and methods, implicit practices, modes of being and even realities in works by philosophers, philologists and culture experts (Zhabina, 2006; Antonova, 2011; Nefedova, 2012; Pavilch, 2014; Rubtsova, 2015). We believe all of the above can be treated as specific components of the person's mental experience prompting us to talk about explicit and implicit human experience, i.e. according to Moroshkina (Moroshkina & Ivanchei, 2012, p. 123) to introduce differentiated classifications of the person's subjective experience.

We have discussed ratio of explicit and implicit knowledge in the structure of parental competence in communication with children of pre-school age in the previous papers (Gusakova, 2014). Now we have a new purpose – to demonstrate that structure of parental competence includes not only knowledge, but also more extensive spaces, namely components of the person's mental experience: learning techniques, professional competence and professional attitude.

Classic research in cognitive psychology concerning explicit and implicit knowledge focuses on how and to what extent implicit knowledge may be expressed (consciously and verbally) and modified, i.e. whether it is possible to extend implicitly acquired abstract rule of action to other situations (Moroshkina & Ivanchei, 2012). For now the most pressing issue is a ratio of explicit and implicit factors affecting efficiency of actions of research subjects.

In our previous research of parental competence we have come to the conclusion that explicit and implicit forms of knowledge are not “competitive”, but rather complementary elements, and being so, they can enhance and improve efficiency of verbal influence on a child, which is a part of parental competence (Gusakova, 2014). We thought it was important to find out how well professional psychologists with different professional and life experience in communication with children would do demonstrating their parental competence in communication with children.

Here we study parental competence in communication with children of primary school age. We believe that parental competence can be viewed as an integral indicator of competence in communication with children due to the fact that it is formed under the influence of both implicit and explicit learning. That is why manifestations of parental

competence will be influenced by various peculiarities of psychologists' mental experience – from professional to personal.

Components of mental experience that we have studied in psychologists (professional competence, professional attitude, professional learning), can be divided into components of implicit and explicit experience. Let us validate such division of mental experience components based on works by M. Kholodnaya.

Professional competence may be conscious (the longer a psychologist works in his/her field the more competent he/she believes himself/herself to be) and implicit. Such division of competence into explicit and implicit is possible subject to the fact that work experience per se does not make anyone experienced, but gives an opportunity to gain experience.

This distinction was identified in M. Kholodnaya's research of different types of aptitude in adults (2002). For instance, a group of competent and gifted people is characterized by a high level of mastery in their field, which does not always correlate with their work experience, but instead is connected with a high level of involuntary intellectual control. We thought it possible to correlate work experience with explicit professional competence, and high level of involuntary intellectual control with implicit professional competence.

We have also divided such component of mental experience as perception and assessment of difficulties and problems a psychologist might face when communicating with children, into explicit and implicit elements. We have taken psychologist's self-assessment on a scale from "very easy" to "very difficult" as an explicit assessment of difficulties of work with children. Degree of openness of a specialist's cognitive position was taken as an implicit perception of difficulties of work. This parameter reflects proneness to using generic categories instead of focusing on specific facts and occurrences, enabling the person to perceive everything that is happening, including difficulties, as manifestation of general consistent patterns. Such position reflects implicit readiness (attitude) to perceive difficulties and problems as a natural element of experience.

The next component of mental experience which we have considered is professional learning, also divided into implicit and explicit elements. Explicit professional learning here shall mean extended education, such as seminars and trainings attended by psychologists. We call it reactive learning, since active personal position has no importance for it. Implicit learning shall mean proactive learning, which occurs when one writes academic papers requiring active independent work with materials and data in psychology. And though research is not intended for professional learning per se, but it occurs implicitly due to active acquisition of new mental experience.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

38 school psychologists from Odessa (females, 21 to 55 y.o., professional experience from 7 months to 18 years) took part in the research.

### **Assessments and Measures**

Psychologists were introduced to a questionnaire and psychodiagnostic techniques on one-to-one basis. We performed quality analysis of psychologists' parental competence and contribution of each identified component (professional competence, attitude and learning) into manifestation of parental competence.

We used questionnaires to collect data about work experience, self-assessment of difficulties of work, education obtained and research performed.

### **Situation completion technique by N. Mikheyeva (SCT).**

This technique is a set of 20 situations (Mikheyeva, ), each to be completed with a description of parental response. Four types of situations – protest against the rules, expression of wishes that push the boundaries too far, display of activity and expression of

suffering – require different parental responses, which we have considered as a feedback in communication with a child. Analysis of answers enabled us to distinguish such elementary feedback scales as efficiency (number of positive elements) and detail (number of words in feedback). Integral scales were calculated based on elementary indicators – coefficient of feedback efficiency (efficiency/detail ratio) and indicator of predictability of feedback efficiency (correlation between efficiency and detail).

#### **Ideal computer by M. Kholodnaya**

In a conversation with a psychologist M. Kholodnaya (2012) suggests to ask any questions coming to mind to the ideal computer for 10 minutes. Analysis of questions asked enabled us to distinguish four categories: objectified, subjectified, categorical and factual questions. Ratio of the above question categories makes it possible to determine degree of openness of cognitive position.

#### **The Matching Familiar Figures Test by J. Kagan (MFFT)**

J. Kagan’s technique (1966) for assessment of cognitive style reflexivity enables to determine impulsive and reflexive cognitive style.

#### **Results**

Let us discuss components of mental experience having effect on efficiency of psychologists’ feedback statements in four types of situations involving communication with a child: situation 1 – the child protests against accepted rules; situation 2 – the child expresses wishes that push the boundaries too far; situation 3 – the child displays activity and initiative; situation 4 – the child expresses moral or physical suffering.

Table No. 1. Differences in degree of feedback efficiency in psychologists with different mental experience (Mann-Whitney test\* - tendency at significance level  $p=0.10$ ; \*\* - differences at significance level  $p=0.05$ ).

<b>Components of mental experience</b>	<b>Situation 1</b>	<b>Situation 2</b>	<b>Situation 3</b>	<b>Situation 4</b>
Experience in working as a psychologist (explicit competence)	143	136	155	142
Reflexivity of cognitive style (implicit competence)	49	35**	36**	51
Openness of cognitive position (implicit ease)	175	177	169	180
Self-assessment of complexity degree of work with children (explicit ease)	127	130	129	124
Proactive learning (implicit)	114	98.5*	79**	95**
Reactive learning (explicit)	140	136	140	137

As we can see in Table No. 1, number of productive feedback elements, present in statements made by psychologists, depends on two factors – proactive learning and reflexivity of cognitive style. These differences manifest themselves in situations when a child expresses his/her needs that push the boundaries too far and when a child displays his/her activity. In situations when a child expresses suffering, only one factor (proactive learning) has an impact on statement efficiency.

Unlike implicit components of mental experience, explicit components of mental experience have no impact on statement efficiency.

Professional competence (explicit)		Professional competence (implicit) p<0.05
Ease-oriented attitude (explicit)	<b>Parental competence (feedback efficiency) in situations 2 and 3</b>	Ease-oriented attitude (implicit)
Reactive learning (explicit)		Proactive learning (implicit) P<0.05

Fig. 1. Structure of implicit components of mental experience having an impact on feedback efficiency in psychologists' parental competence.

Let us consider factors of mental experience, which have an impact on the level of detail of feedback statements in four types of situations involving communication with a child.

Table No. 2. Differences in feedback detail in psychologists with different mental experience (Mann-Whitney test\*\* - differences at significance level p=0.05).

Components of mental experience	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	Situation 4
Experience in working as a psychologist (explicit competence)	113**	98**	154	130
Reflexivity of cognitive style (implicit competence)	65	57	56	65
Openness of cognitive position (implicit ease)	175	177	167	179
Self-assessment of complexity degree of work with children (explicit ease)	139	149	141	143
Proactive learning (implicit)	89**	92**	118	105
Reactive learning (explicit)	138.5	136	132	134

As we can see in Table No. 2, feedback detail depends on two factors – work experience and proactive learning. These differences are significant in situations when a child steps over the line or merely expresses a wish to push the boundaries. In situations when children display activity or express suffering, no significant components of mental experience were determined.

Thus, level of statement detail is influenced by certain components (explicit and implicit) of mental experience.

Professional competence (explicit) p<0.05		Professional competence (implicit)
Ease-oriented attitude (explicit)	<b>Parental competence (feedback detail) in situations 1 and 2</b>	Ease-oriented attitude (implicit)
Reactive learning (explicit)		Proactive learning (implicit) p<0.05

Fig. 2. Structure of explicit and implicit components of mental experience having an impact on feedback detail in psychologists' parental competence.

Taking into account impact of components of mental experience on elementary indicators of parental competence (level of detail and efficiency of statements), and the fact that coefficient of statement usefulness (efficiency/detail ratio) did not depend on mental experience of the research subjects, we have introduced such an integral indicator as a connection between the level of detail and efficiency of statements. We believe this indicator to reveal that efficiency of statement can grow together with detail enhancement, or it can be independent of the number of words uttered, i.e. this is an indicator of predictability of feedback efficiency. Degree of connection between elementary indicators of feedback may vary depending on components of psychologists' mental experience.

Table No. 3. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients between the level of detail and efficiency of statements in subgroups of psychologists with different mental experience (\* - tendency at significance level  $p=0.10$ ; \*\* - correlation at significance level  $p=0.05$ ; \*\*\* - correlation at significance level  $p=0.01$ ).

	Explicit components of mental experience			Implicit components of mental experience			
	Professional competence	Perceiving work as easy	Reactive learning	Impulsive cognitive style	Reflexive cognitive style	Open cognitive position	Proactive learning
<b>Situation 1</b>	0.59**	0.59**	<b>0.52***</b>	0.37	0.65*	0.35	0.59*
<b>Situation 2</b>	0.43	0.69***	0.38	<b>0.52**</b>	0.13	0.54**	0.48
<b>Situation 3</b>	0.47	0.51*	0.22	0.04	0.63	0.37	0.11
<b>Situation 4</b>	0.49*	0.33	<b>0.44**</b>	0.17	0.52	0.31	0.09

As we can see in Table No. 3, all factors of mental experience have an impact on degree of connection between elementary feedback indicators: professional competence, attitude and learning. However, contribution of each particular component is ambiguous and requires further discussion.

Fig. 3 displays that efficiency becomes more closely connected with the level of statement detail under the impact of explicit and implicit components of mental experience in situations when a child crosses over the line or expresses a wish to push the boundaries. In situations of display of activity and expression of suffering connection between the number of words in a statement and usefulness thereof is shown only under the impact of explicit factors.



Professional competence (explicit) Situation 1; $p < 0.05$		Professional competence (implicit) Situation 2; $P < 0.05$
Ease-oriented attitude (explicit) Situations 1, 2; $P < 0.05$ , $p < 0.01$	<b>Parental competence</b> (predictability of feedback usefulness)	Ease-oriented attitude (implicit) Situation 2; $P < 0.05$
Reactive learning (explicit), Situations 1,4; $P < 0.01$ , $p < 0.05$		Proactive learning (implicit)

Fig. 3. Structure of explicit and implicit components of mental experience having an impact on connection between feedback elements in psychologists' parental competence.

### Discussion

Thus, we can conclude that psychologist's work experience does not make him/her a competent parent, yet professional development achieved through active work on publications and analysis of materials in psychology improves one's ability to bring his/her professional communication skills into personal life, enabling to combine two types of competence in communication with children – professional and parental. Reflexivity of psychologist's cognitive style demonstrates that he/she is capable of involuntary control of his/her intellectual activity, thus avoiding mistakes in interaction with children.

Based on the fact that in situations when a child crosses the line we see no impact of the reviewed factors of mental experience on feedback efficiency, one can assume that factors other than components of mental experience we have selected are essential for efficient verbal behaviour of an adult in a given situation.

In his research of "functional" and "existential" self A. Bondarenko (2000, p. 218) describes the path of development of psychologist's identity: "A specialist starts with sizing himself or herself up for the role of a psychologist in social environment, assessing his/her motives, purposes and capabilities, and delving into professional problems and technologies, and then proceeds to applying some concepts and techniques to himself/herself. During this professional and at the same time personal efforts he/she reaches the heights of "existential" self and returns to "functional" self, thus achieving professional and at the same time personal identity." In fact, A. Bondarenko registers dualism of psychologist's "existential" self and "functional" self, and even some self-sufficiency of these concepts as a result of insufficient personal and professional self-identification of a psychologist. Probably certain results of our research can be attributed to this dualism of "professional" and "existential" self.

More extensive work experience increases "verbality". Probably this is a manifestation of a professional myth that professional competence is revealed through detailed statements. At the same time proactive learning stimulates more verbose statements, probably due to use of more general knowledge and more grammatically complex structures (typical for written language).

Professional competence factor has an effect on degree of connection between elementary feedback indicators: connection is higher in case of high explicit competence (work experience of over 5 years), whereas implicit professional competence (reflexivity) has an ambiguous effect on degree of connection – if it is high, it affects connection between indicators in situations when a child crosses the line, and if it is low, it affects the indicator in situations when a child wishes to push the boundaries.

Factor of professional attitude to perception of difficulties and problems in communication with children also has an effect on degree of connection between elementary feedback indicators: high connection is noted at low explicit assessment of difficulties at work as well as at low implicit assessment of difficulties.

Professional learning factor has an effect on degree of connection between elementary feedback indicators: connection is higher at high level of explicit and implicit learning.

Degree of connection between feedback efficiency and detail points to the degree of predictability of feedback efficiency: the more a psychologist talks, the more useful things he/she will say, and vice versa. If there is no connection between indicators, we cannot predict efficiency of statements: a long statement may or may not be useless, and a short statement may or may not be useful.

On the whole, in situations when a child crosses the line or wishes to push the boundaries, predictability of efficiency of the psychologist's feedback based on his/her mental experience is higher than in situations when a child displays activity or expresses suffering, where predictability is minimal. We see that explicit and implicit components of mental experience have an effect on such predictability in some cases and no effect whatsoever in other cases.

Hence, we can see that parental competence in communication with children of primary school age is a complex structural and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by explicit and implicit components of mental experience, as well as other individual peculiarities of psychologists. At the same time research findings pose more questions: Why are education and work experience in psychology not enough to form parental competence in psychologists? Is it true that formation and development of professionalism in psychologists does not affect their personality structures, i.e. psychologists' mental experience is divided between domains of "professional" and "existential" self? Is it a basic characteristic of mental experience or is it determined by one's individual peculiarities?

Study of factors and structure of psychologists' professionalism is far from being complete, with many essential questions remaining without answers. That is why we believe that reference to the notion of mental experience in its implicit and explicit forms can enhance our perception of practicing psychologists to a great extent.

## **Conclusions**

### **1. Psychologists' professional competence:**

- psychologists with a more extensive work experience make more detailed statements in situations 1 and 2, whereas psychologists with a high level of reflexivity make more efficient statements in situations 2 and 3;

- psychologists with a more extensive work experience are predictable with regard to feedback efficiency in situation 1, and psychologists with a high level of impulsivity – in situation 2;

### **2. Psychologists' professional attitude:**

Psychologists with an ease-oriented attitude to communication with children are predictable with regard to feedback efficiency in situations 1 and 2, and psychologists with an open cognitive position – in situation 2.

### **Psychologists' professional learning:**

Psychologists engaged in research give more detailed feedback in situations 1 and 2, and more efficient feedback – in situations 2 and 3;

Psychologists obtaining extended education are predictable with regard to feedback efficiency in situations 1 and 4.

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