

# Traditions of Research on the Psychology of Understanding in Student Training as Part of Empirical, Sociocultural and Existential Realities of Being

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**Abstract---** *The paper examines traditions of research on the psychology of understanding in student training as part of empirical, sociocultural and existential realities of being. Three realities of being correspond to specific traditions of psychological research, methods, frameworks and types of understanding which can be referred to the educational process. The authors sought to bring content to the educational process with a view to developing understanding as the learning process and outcomes of training of university students. Understanding of student training can positively evolve in the cognitive tradition of psychological research, in the hermeneutic tradition and in the existential tradition of psychological research. The following indicators are used to record students' progression in the processual field of understanding: object of development (from the component "Individual-object" to the developed component "Individual-world"); the object's structure (from science-based knowledge to the approach towards the person's inner world and essential strengths); presuppositions and conditions, basic processes (from the development of empirical thinking in terms of terminologization/determinologization to the formation of theoretical thinking in terms of ontologization/deontologization); determinants of development (from verbal/representational explanations as translation, memorization and reproduction of texts to the arrival of one's own ways of being in society); mechanisms and driving forces (through increasing complexity of ways to develop understanding); and the outcome of the development of understanding (from understanding as knowledge to understanding as comprehension).*

**Keywords---** *Understanding in Education, Cognitive Tradition, Hermeneutic Tradition, Existential Tradition, Higher Education.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Viktor V. Znakov's conceptual approaches to the psychology of understanding the multidimensional world of man constitute the methodological framework of this paper [1, p. 16-29]. According to this approach, the world of man consists of three realities – the empiric one, the sociocultural one and the existential one. All of these realities can form a uniform continuum for the student's progression in the processual field of understanding as part of specially organized activities.

In his research, Znakov highlights the fact that two systemically important features represent understanding in each of the three realities. The first feature is that, when understanding phenomena and events of the world around

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him, man always transcends the actual boundaries of things comprehended and connects the newly shaped meanings to the context of his own life activities. The second feature is that, by understanding the world, himself and other people in this world, man always relates things he comprehends to his ideas about how things should be. These are man's social, group and moral standards of being part of society [2, 3 and 4].

Specific traditions of psychological research, methods, frameworks and types of understanding, which can be referred to the educational process, correspond to these three realities.

The objective of the paper is to bring content to the educational process with a view to developing understanding as the learning process and outcomes of university student training.

In examining practical and theoretical approaches to the psychology of understanding in education, in which three realities appear as a combination of things common and varied, it is necessary to answer a number of fundamental questions that help detect the object of development in education (what develops?), presuppositions and conditions (from what does it develop?), the object's structure (what transforms during development? how does development take place?), initial contradictions, mechanisms and driving forces (how does development take place?) as well as the direction, forms and outcomes of development (where and in what does something develop?) [5, p. 53]. Taken together and given an appropriate content-related interpretation, all of the above categories ensure a sufficiently complete progression of students in the processual field of understanding.

## II. MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological framework for the present paper is as follows: philosophy as the study of common laws of development of nature, society and thinking; psychology as the study of patterns of development and functioning of psyche as being a special form of human life; and educational psychology as the study of psychological issues in education and training, including the implementation of inclusive education.

The paper is based on the following fundamental provisions of research studies presenting the main findings by Russian scholars in the field of understanding:

- Unity of conscience and activity (B. G. Ananyev, A. G. Asmolov, B. S. Bratus, L. S. Vygotsky, V. V. Davydov, V. P. Zinchenko, A. N. Leontyev, A. V. Petrovsky, S. L. Rubinstein, V. I. Slobodchikov, D. I. Feldstein, M. G. Yaroshevski);
- Dynamic nature of understanding's development in the educational process (T. Z. Adamyan, O. S. Anisimov, V. A. Baldova, Yu. V. Balyasova, E. G. Belykova, M. E. Bershadsky, A. A. Verbitsky, G. G. Granik, M. V. Grigoryeva, V. A. Guruzhapov, A. F. Zakirova, Yu. V. Senko);
- Nature of understanding in philosophy (H.-G. Gadamer, S. S. Gusev, E. Husserl, W. Dilthey, P. Ricoeur, G. L. Tulchinsky, M. Heidegger, F. Schleiermacher, G. G. Shpet).
- From a conceptual perspective, of special importance is the following:
- Russian and international theories and concepts of personality (A. L. Zhuravlev, V. P. Zinchenko, B. F. Lomov, G. Allport, A. V. Petrovsky, C. Rogers, D. I. Feldstein, etc.);

- Theories and concepts of the subject and, in particular, those of the subjective approach (K. A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, B. G. Ananyev, L. I. Antsyferova, S. K. Bondareva, A. V. Brushlinsky, A. A. Derkach, A. L. Zhuravlev, V. V. Znakov, I. G. Petrov, A. O. Prokhorov, V. M. Rozin, S. L. Rubinstein, E. A. Sergiyenko, etc.);
- Theories and concepts of human existence (V. V. Znakov, V. A. Labunskaya, R. M. Shamionova, etc.);
- Psychological development tools in the personality's conceptual sphere (E. Yu. Artemyeva, B. S. Bratus, L. S. Vygotsky, A. N. Leontyev, D. A. Leontyev, A. Lobok, S. Maddi, V. F. Petrenko, C. Rogers, S. L. Rubinstein, V. Frankl, etc.)

The educational experiment involved 84 students enrolled in the Department of Asian Studies and History of the Pacific National University. Another 83 students enrolled in the Department of Philology, Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication and in the Department of Psychology and Socio-Humanitarian Technology formed the control group.

Let us now consider the realities of man's being in education within the boundaries of psychological research traditions and present the model of students' progression in the processual field of understanding.

### III. RESULTS

The cognitive tradition in psychological research, or the paradigmatic way of understanding the world, corresponds to empirical reality, the framework for understanding are knowledge and meanings, and understanding/knowledge is the type of understanding.

The quantitative, rather than qualitative, increment of knowledge occurs in the cognitive tradition. In terms of the educational process, however, the qualitative increment of knowledge is the primary vector for knowledge accumulation. The subject who realizes understanding (who accumulates knowledge, in this case) acts, as a rule, as the object of an activity. He has an opportunity to evaluate whether judgements are true or false provided he masters relevant measuring procedures. Furthermore, it is necessary to make sure the understanding of a judgement's trueness does not depend on the understanding subject's individual and psychological characteristics. Participants in the educational process do not usually build subject/subject relationships.

Cognitive structures and patterns are the object of development (what develops?) in the context of the *cognitive tradition in psychological research*. Paradigmatic judgements are based on the objectively existing knowledge that can be verified by means of experiments. Interest is expressed in general facts and rules, excluding exceptions, and work is carried out with existing factual (untransformed) materials.

The *paradigmatic way of understanding the world* is a scientific method aimed at finding evidence in support of the trueness of judgements based on their conformity to empirical facts. Reasoning about judgements is done using strict rules, provisions and definitions. Its distinctive features include the following: a) sufficiency to record formal relationships in understanding events and phenomena of the world around us; b) demand for explanations based on the principles of predictability, verifiability and reproducibility of information; and c) use of logical reasoning and need for various classifications of events and phenomena. The *paradigmatic way of understanding the world* is closely related to the "cognitive unconscious" (Piaget, 1996) and the domination of the intuitive cognitive style as

compared to the rational, or analytical, style. In his research, Jean Piaget points out that, even when the subject realizes the content of his thinking, “he ignores functional and structural reasons determining his train of thought... He has no access to the internal mechanisms that direct his thinking” [6, p. 126]. Researchers T. V. Kornilova, O. V. Stepanosova and E. L. Grigorenko (2006) highlight that “the distinctive nature of intuitive knowledge consists in the fact that, on one hand, the subject does not oversee the process of obtaining it and, on the other, he cannot provide – for himself or for other people – a discursive justification for, or a logical proof of, the correctness of the emerged anticipation” [7, p. 128]. Consequently, the subject relies on his intuition and speculations when making forecasts. Under present-day educational conditions, it is important for the subject of the educational process to control the process of obtaining knowledge, its amount and sources of information and to know how to substantiate the emerged anticipation and the feeling that observed phenomena blends into a whole. According to V. V. Rozanov, “we compared human knowledge to a broken chain and aspiration for understanding to aspiration towards restoring its integrality and finding this chain’s invisible links. To make this comparison more complete, let us say that the links of this infinitely long chain are infinitely small when taken separately, and only sharp eyes is able to realize that many links are lacking... This is why the world of nature and of life is easily understandable to people with a rough mind and so incomprehensible to people with a deep and fine mind. The former find everything evident whereas every trivial thing remains enigmatic to the latter. The former live without ever being surprised or worried...” [8, p. 19].

Thus, the phenomenon of understanding is perceived as inclusion of new knowledge into the context of the subject’s existing knowledge. The content-related objectivity of knowledge, however, is not a matter of a separate analysis.

A significant technique for studying understanding in the cognitive tradition in psychological research is the analysis of knowledge rather than of understanding.

In the empirical reality of being, one of the indicators of progressing understanding is the articulation of questions of empirical nature, recorded by the authors and related to text. What the authors mean by “empirical question” is a simple and basic question which does not oblige a person to show his or her own attitude towards the issue under discussion and which does not contain any new information besides existing information. Research carried out by present-day psychologists and philosophers point to the *linguistic turn* related to the replacement of the cognitive theory by the semantic one and by some other linguistic theories. Attention is also drawn to *knowledge-oriented phenomenological approaches*, *hermeneutic experiences* are being updated within the framework of the general theory of understanding and interpretation, and *deconstructive* and *postmodern* practices are being developed. Of special importance is current research into extra-scientific knowledge, and experience is gained in studying knowledge and cognitive activities associated with new computer technologies. This manifold variety of being demands that man should adopt a special attitude towards independent goal-setting and his own axiological development, impossible without his addressing questions to himself and to people around him.

Question-posing refers to the study of stylistics of speech and of public speaking. We teach university students to pose scientific questions in order to obtain new scientific knowledge which is defined as knowledge in which three

main cognitive functions can be realized: the descriptive, the explanatory and the predictive ones [9, p. 50-54]. This is why another distinctive feature of scientific questions is the possibility to use them to obtain answers in the form of scientific descriptions, explanations and predictions. The authors take into consideration the specific nature of empirical and theoretical knowledge as a basis for the development of student's ability to pose questions leading to their understanding of various phenomena and events of the world around them.

Assertion of scientific facts discovered by someone and the largely reproductive nature of the educational process within the boundaries of empirical reality make teachers using traditional teaching approaches pay insufficient attention to processes of understanding.

The authors recorded considerable domination of questions of empirical nature in students' answers during baseline surveys, multi-year observation of student performance during school teaching practice and State examinations on pedagogy, psychology and other disciplines.

Specifically, a reliable criterion for learners' understanding educational texts is their posing questions to them.

For instance, in his Preface to L. P. Doblayev's *Conceptual structure of educations texts and problems with understanding* (1982), V. V. Davydov observes that schoolchildren's independent posing of questions to texts and finding answers to them makes their school activities to be a combination of active actions directed to transform the sense-bearing structure of text. Further, Davydov highlights that "the main of them is the detection of hidden questions in text and the discovery of a problem situation and its distinctive features. At the same time, the technique of schoolchildren's independent posing questions to texts... is an important way to self-control their understanding, which helps them... to avoid discrepancy between their sense of understanding and actual understanding" [10, p. 3].

Teachers possess this habit of questioning texts and develop this habit among students, and they should not teach without going beyond empirical knowledge.

As part of the authors' analysis of the human empirical reality of being in society, consideration was taken of the following specific characteristics of empirical knowledge, as presented by V. V. Davydov:

"1. Knowledge is generated through comparison of objects and ideas about them, resulting in the detection of their common properties.

2. Comparison leads to the identification of a group of objects fitting into a specific category (on the basis of a formally common property with no reference to internal relationships between them).

3. When representing an object, observation-based knowledge reflects its external properties.

4. An object's formally common property is placed next to the special and unique one. Specification of knowledge consists in selecting illustrations and examples belonging to this category of objects.

5. Terms are a means for recording knowledge" [11, pp. 302-309].

In his monography *Anthropological outlooks in Russian education* [12], V. I. Slobodchikov examines the limited capacity of empirical thinking, aimed at the small number of everyday, artisan skills. Empirical knowledge neither

provides insight into the essence of objects and phenomena nor allows a person to draw his own conclusions. Empirical thinking makes people act in accordance with patterns and clichés and is deprived of creativity.

As early as the beginning of the 1970s, V. V. Davydov insisted that major issues in modern education could be resolved by changing the type of thinking projected by educational goals, content and teaching methods and suggested that the educational system should be refocused to promote modern scientific and theoretical thinking instead of rational and empirical thinking [11].

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, V. V. Davydov's suggestion remains relevant for university students.

The present study emphasizes that questions in themselves are a necessary means of scientific knowledge in a case where question-posing and answering allows university students to make an efficient use of new, previously unknown knowledge in his theoretical or practical work. As part of training, the authors draw university students' attention to the significance of theoretical questions for the purpose of obtaining new scientific knowledge. Special attention is given to theoretical knowledge aimed at detecting the genetically initial and common foundation inside an integral system. Theoretical knowledge reflects internal relationships and links and goes beyond conceptions while highlighting the link between the existing universal relationship of the integral system and of its various manifestations as a link between the universal and the unique (V. V. Davydov).

It is worth reminding that, based on the established correlation between educational objectives and the *empirical type of reality*, understanding/knowledge reflects the specific functioning of the traditional educational environment at university, which is not favorable to students' personal fulfilment in the processual field of understanding.

To promote effective activities directed at improving understanding in education among university students, there is a need to develop speech formations in early youth, including the ability to carry out a comprehensive and conscious ***terminologization and determinologization of text to be understood***. As a rule, the ability to carry out the ***terminologization*** (*transfer of commonly used words and phenomena to the category of terms*) and ***determinization*** (*transfer of terms to the category of empirical facts, phenomena and events, accompanied by lost connection to scientific notions*) of text develops sufficiently well if educational tasks are correlated with the empirical type of reality where understanding/knowledge is necessarily realized. However, students do not master efficiently even these skills.

When teaching understanding to students, the authors took into consideration L. S. Vygotsky's concept of the internal development of scientific notions. Vygotsky observes that "a notion is neither a simple combination of associative ties, acquired through memorization nor an automatic mental skill, but a complex and authentic act of thinking that cannot be acquired by simple memorization. Instead, this skill requires that the child's thought move, in its internal evolution, to the highest degree for the notion to emerge in his mind" [13, p. 272].

The authors perceive the formation of understanding during university student training as follows. A *theoretical analysis and generalization of scientific data of the phenomenon under investigation* contribute to a) the detection of essential features of a phenomenon or a process; b) the identification of criteria relating to the fully accomplished phenomenon. At the present stage of research, it is possible to provide specific content to the notion of a psychic

phenomenon or event. Although a sufficiently complete description of the phenomenon under investigation cannot be given, specially organized activities result in the emergence of a notion. The preliminary definition of ‘notion’ is necessary already at this stage of research, since “one who lacks a specific notion, as an initial one, is not even given an object” (L. Feuerbach).

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The present research has shown that it is necessary to involve students into specially organized activities aimed at implementing the processes of *terminologization* and *determinologization* of text in training, at developing the practice of question-posing and to give serious consideration to the establishment of the conceptual framework of academic disciplines, among other things.

The authors admit the following components of the understanding model in the cognitive tradition of psychological research. The *object of development* is the Individual-object. The *object's structure* is academic knowledge as acquisition of practical skills and actions of cultural or productive nature. *Conditions and presuppositions* are understanding-recognition. *Basic processes* is empirical thinking in the form of terminologization-determinization. *Determinants of development* are verbal and representational explanations by means of transmission, memorization and reproduction of texts subject to understanding. *Mechanisms and driving forces* are the textual, associative experiment, posing of empirical questions and elaboration of notions. The *outcome of development* is understanding-knowledge.

##### 4.1. Hermeneutic tradition in psychological research

Next, let us examine the hermeneutic tradition in psychological research on understanding within the context of the sociocultural reality of human being, characterized by the narrative way of understanding the world; the framework for understanding are opinions and meanings, and understanding/interpretation is the type of understanding (V. V. Znakov).

The methodological quest of the humanities, among which modern psychology aspires to find its place, inevitably substantiate changes taking place in the type of education that has taken shape recently. Psychology of understanding training can provide answers to current challenges, since it focuses on new methodological considerations that foster the study not only of the psychic qualities of man, but also of the subject in his interactions with any set of signs having a meaning and capable of producing new meanings. This area of psychological research outlines understanding as spaces that make it possible to provide knowledge with meaning, value-oriented and significance. To understand means to comprehend new knowledge in a creative, “hermeneutic” way and to insert it into a cultural and historical period and in line with the established type of subjectivity and rationality [14].

In present-day education, the focus is being shifting from the external, sensual and empirical aspect of human existence to the internal, substantive and hermeneutically oriented frame.

Thus, the skills in implementing metaphorization and demetaphorization are given a special role in producing narrative texts. According to V. P. Zinchenko, “the appeal to metaphors (*in the hermeneutic tradition of psychological research* – T. B.) seemingly removes the illusion of clearness, to show the insufficiency – and

sometimes the plainness – of definitions, to find again the mystery of meaning and makes one want to touch it and render it more discernible. Metaphors and semantic images help revive existing concepts and notions of meaning. The road to living notions, which are a kind of intelligible matter, lies across living metaphors. In the long run, metaphors facilitate comprehension without which no extraction of suitable knowledge is possible” [15, p. 102]. “This is why the use of metaphors is an integral and ineradicable property of any verbal thinking, scientific or poetic” [15, p. 112].

Modern scholars emphasize that metaphors are related to the ‘see-how’ phenomenon. At the same time, metaphors are explained by listing meanings in which an image is perceived as a meaning. The result is an intuitive attitude keeping the meaning and the image together. To see the meaning of a metaphor is to perform an action because to understand means to do something.

Given the insufficient number of publications on the issue under consideration, the authors managed to find some research studies that resolve methodological and practical problems of understanding in training.

In our viewpoint, A. F. Zakirova innovatively groups termonologization/determinologization and metaphorization/demetaphorization under a hermeneutic interpretation of pedagogical knowledge based on philosophical and scientific approaches [16, p. 202].

According to A. F. Zakirova, the interpreter realizes the idea of combining “learning/cognitive activities and self-discovery, a rational approach to learning materials and its comprehension by means of image thinking and intuition, building on academia’s conceptual framework as well as images and associative means of arts and everyday life” [16, p. 203].

The hermeneutic tradition is where individual development during training takes place and where personal meanings are formed.

The authors deem important A. F. Zakirova’s view on the interrelation between understanding and interpretation, understanding and explanation during training [16].

Analysis of the elements of ‘understanding’ and their comparison to the process of explanation provides the answer to the following question: on the development of what skills should teachers focus their attention? In our view, it is important to know how to find the central idea in a text, its theme and rheme (i.e. the problem, posed and resolved), to discover contradictions in a text, to phrase possible ways out of the situation and to establish links between the main components of a text. These and other skills are centered around the cognitive procedure, developed in the present study under the name of ‘understanding and problematization of context’ and directed at comprising systems of significations and meanings on the basis of which individuals build the image of their world for their own ways of being. Furthermore, according to A. F. Zakirova, special hermeneutic terms should be involved too: “translation of academic texts into the language of the real pedagogical process; commenting pedagogical texts; polemic dialogues with the author of a text (support and refutation of main ideas); compilation of the frequency word book of texts; creation of the conceptual structure of texts; genre processing of texts; interpretation of pedagogical texts from the perspective of various subjects of the pedagogical process; search for



universal cultural meanings in texts; comparison between the terminological and metaphorical composition of pedagogical texts of various genres and styles” [16, pp. 208-209].

As a rule, the skill in performing the *conceptualization and deconceptualization* of texts is successfully developing by correlating learning objectives and the *sociocultural type of reality* in which *understanding-interpretation* is mandatorily carried out. Metaphorization as an ongoing process that takes place within the boundaries of the sociocultural reality of human existence is defined as expansion of the word’s conceptual volume resulting from emerging figurative significations and intensification of its expressive qualities and characteristics. Demetaphorization is the reverse process. Conceptualization is the process of deriving significations of a text from empirical reality into sociocultural reality by making subjectively substantiated assertions. In terms of understanding, conceptualization refers to the introduction of ontological ideas into the accumulated set of empirical data and to the initial theoretic organization of materials which ensures connection between events and phenomena of the world around the individual that he considers important. Deconceptualization in understanding is the reverse process of textual conceptualization which contributes to the specification of separate component of this or that scholarly system, typology, concept or theory. The present research study shows that these processes present a significant challenge for students and need to be closely studied and developed as part of specially organized activities.

Besides, the narrative way of understanding the world is typical for the hermeneutic tradition in psychological research into understanding within the boundaries of the sociocultural reality of human existence in the world. Therefore, the narrative way of understanding the world in training needs to be addressed [17, 18].

Construction of the sign structure of a person’s life experience under modern conditions requires intensification of the signification of narration (story) as a means for generating understanding, awareness and transfer of this understanding into various spheres of life. Narrating is regarded as an interdisciplinary category focusing on the so-called ‘narrative turn’, also known in a number of international research studies (see Kreiswirth, 1995; Herman, 2005; Jahn, 2005; Ryan, 2005, etc.). This narrative turn is increasing its influence in social and cultural studies, including pedagogy and psychology. For instance, Koschorke (2012), Wood (2011), Stanzel (2011) and Bruner (2003) carry out research into the general theory of narrative, the art of narrative, theoretical approach to narrative as a linguistic and life phenomenon. Hyvaerinen (2010) investigates narrative coherence, Currie (2010) works on the philosophical aspect of narrative, and Fludernik (2009) provides readers with ideas about narratology by introducing them to the theory of narrative. Wardetzky (2007) relates narration to the upbringing process and Bambert (2007) updates the formation of selfness and identity in narratives.

In line with Nelson’s assertion (“they learn, that is ‘narrativize’ their experience”), the following scholars conduct research on the role and specificities of the subject’s narrative understanding of the surrounding reality. Fahrenwald, Hartung, Steininger and Fuchs present narration as an educational experience. Keller and Lehmn examine individual and collective dimensions of human existence in narratives. Engelhardt studies interrelations between categories such as narration, biography and identity. Gansen highlights the need to study narrative while developing the concept of Self (literally, *Selbstkonzept*), Kasper and Felden work on the learning process in

narrative, and Norden, Pandel and Barricelli point to the link between life stories and everyday events which govern relationships between people, determine their social status, constitute significant periods in their lives and so on.

At the same time, researchers highlight that, in the current context, traditional relations between training and narration are being changed. For instance, Hartung, Steininger and Fuchs observe that it is not just a matter of learning narration and of learning on the basis of narratives, but also of learning through narratives. In their study, the above researchers state that “we need to learn in order to narrate and to narrate in order to learn”.

In this context, a new view on understanding as being the ‘collection’ of existential experience is in no way fortuitous in research conducted by scholars such as Scholz (2001), Rissmann (2004), Angehrn (2004), Gaus (2006) Rehbein (2009), Saalman (2009), Wagenschein (2010), Gruschka (2011), Kiel (2012), Combe (2012), Kolenda (2012) and Gerhard (2012), among others.

Human needs, such as conceptual needs, needs in conversation and social needs, acquire a new signification in line with the fact that the anthropological signification of narration consists in the perception of modern man as narrating man (*Der Mensch als homo narrans*). At the same time, the traditional notion of subject is replaced with the idea of the narrative component of subjectivity.

The recent discovery of the role of narrative is directly related to current cultural and social changes that echo the pluralization of forms of cognition, knowledge and life extending to educational and scholarly processes. New learning challenges and needs arise from pluralization, which opens up new vistas for the educational system. The key combination of words describing the processes presented above is ‘new cultures’ – a category that brings up to date complex and multidimensional phenomena such as existential experience, background knowledge and emotional experience. Consequently, new educational cultures are a ground-breaking paradigmatic change focusing on emotional, social and practice-oriented life dimensions that are implemented in narratives.

Research studies by Yu. Kristeva, J. Derrida, N. D. Arutyunova and other focus on distinctive features of narrative produced by people as part of their life activities. As an example, K. A. Andreyeva interprets narrative text from a structural and semantic perspective. V. A. Lukov and VI. A. Lukov examine the subjective organization of academic knowledge, and E. E. Sapogova conducts research on information about autobiographical narratives in the context of cultural and historical psychology. T. R. Sarbin regards narrative as a basic psychological metaphor, E. I. Suleymanova discusses prospects for incorporating “the other’s” word into narrative texts and perceives quoting and a number of adjacent linguistic phenomena as integrations of statements of others in narrative texts. E. V. Pastukhova analyzes narrative in the context of subjectivity, V. Shmid studies narratology and its distinctive features and characteristics, U. Eco and M. N. Epstein present narrative as the “dominant” gene of a person’s biographic culture and V. Yu. Yakovlev analyzes the narrative method of scientific cognition.

V. V. Znakov’s perceptions of the specificities of narrative understanding deserve special attention.

“1. Narrative understanding is based on the subject’s conviction that any situation of human existence can be *interpreted in many ways*. This is the consequence of a substantiated doubt in the existence of ‘objective’ stories happening to people and independent of the narrator’s point of view. The belief that there is some real story waiting

to be discovered before the narrative process is nothing more than an ontological delusion because the narrative about events taking place in human existence starts to change the course of the subject's life as soon as narration starts.

2. In narrative understanding, the subjects makes a conscious and targeted attempt to structure events in such a way that the *sense* of movement (relatedness or continuity) and a *goal* or a value-based final outcome are present in narration. The narrative construction created by the subject should present event in such an order that the attainment of the goal is *verisimilar*. If events are described without taking into consideration of the goal of narration, neither the narrator nor the listener will feel that narration is appropriate. The narrator's main objective is to develop narration towards a meaningful final outcome, that is, to always keep the narrative's goal in mind.

3. Narrative understanding is interlocutory, i.e. it always implies the existence of the understanding subject: terms like 'narrator' and 'listeners' create the artificial division into the active narrator of a story and the passive group of recipients. In fact, listeners are always co-authors, in a sense (Coates, 2001)... [19, p. 114-119].

According to V. V. Znakov, "the narrative understanding of events in human existence is based on one of the event's versions, accepted by the subject. It is targeted, unambiguous, verisimilar and interlocutor-oriented" [19, p. 115]. However, what are the rules of the game that allow life to find unit in the text, to transform external events into a person's internal experience during training and to reach in the text profound conceptual formations that are difficult to comprehend?

The special mission of narrative texts in the educational process is that their creation in training is a tense, long-lasting and important act in the spiritual life of a person. This fact is characterized by unique manifestations that cannot be reproduced in another narrative text and by specificities of a person's individual path in life. Creation of narrative texts in training is a purely psychological method from its very beginning.

The author's assumption is that narrative texts used in university student training are ambivalent. On one hand, narrative texts are used as a means for a person's awareness of himself and of the surrounding reality and, in this case, they acquire an ethical aspect which coherently combine spiritual, moral and ethical components of being. On the other hand, narrative texts are used in the educational process as "transitional texts" and, thus, acquire an essential character as texts that present understanding based on theoretical scholarly generalizations. In specially organized activities, narrative texts can act as the foundation for the subject's theoretical scholarly generalizations. Narrative texts can be a means for presenting theoretical scholarly generalizations.

Narrative texts are texts containing accepted knowledge. The formation of theoretical thinking during university student training opens a distinct possibility to reveal essential relationships that constitute reality. Narrative texts are the foundation for developing essential relationships of human existence in society. Thus, understanding produced by the subject in narrative texts during university training is a special activity consisting in detecting theoretical scholarly generalizations and an attempt to resolve on their basis practical vital challenges.

Educators, psychologists, philosophers, culture experts and historians need to carry out serious work to help individuals to create the text of their own lives, thus “giving meaning and word to millions of narratively silent people...” [20, p. 47-56].

Consequently, it is necessary to involve students, within the boundaries of the hermeneutic tradition in psychological research, in specially organized activities aimed at implementing the *metaphorization/demetaphorization and conceptualization/deconceptualization* of text. The following components of the model being constructed are relevant in these processes. The *object of development* is Individual-signification. The *object's structure* are signification of texts, decryption of knowledge of speech and cultural practices and the reconstruction of the spiritual world of man. *Presuppositions and conditions* are understanding-hypothesis and understanding-unification. *Basic processes* are the shift from empirical thinking to theoretical thinking in the form of metaphorization/demetaphorization and conceptualization/deconceptualization. *Determinants of development* are regulation of significations. *Mechanisms and driving forces* are text modelling, phrasing of question statements, use of hermeneutical techniques (‘truth’/‘non-truth’, ‘hermeneutic circle’) and production of narrative texts. The *outcome of development* is understanding-interpretation.

#### **4.2. Existential tradition in psychological research**

The authors shall now examine the existential tradition in psychological research on understanding in terms of the existential reality of being.

Existential reality of being is presented by the existential tradition in researching human psychology, the thesaurus way of understanding the world; the framework for understanding are emotion and experience, and the type of understanding substantiates the existence of understanding-cognition (V. V. Znakov).

In investigating understanding in terms of the existential reality of being, it is important to point out that understanding in training is the process of a person's psychic activity in which he draws upon his knowledge about the world. Thus, he acquires in the course of specially organized activities new mental experiences enabling him to make free and responsible choices in his contemporary society. The main function of understanding consists in producing the sense of knowledge that the subject obtained from his mental activity by adopting and developing his own ways of working with texts to be interpreted in order to resolve his daily social challenges.

The psychology of teaching understanding combined cognitive and existential paradigms in a non-contradictory way, and in modern education should shift its focus to existential components in which understanding processes and outcomes manifest themselves in individual significations and involvement of the understanding subject to values of being.

A new direction in modern psychology is research into the thesaurus way of understanding phenomena and events of the surrounding world in training.

Currently, the main aim of psychology is to seek new methods for investigating not only a person's psychic qualities but also modern man as a particular creature in terms of his individuality (subjectivity).

In social studies and the humanities, language has, in addition to traditional scientific properties, peculiarities manifesting themselves in its figurative, metaphorical and provocative nature, constructive symbolism and a high level of subjectivity and creativity. The practical sense of social studies and the humanities consists in creating, reproducing, transforming, developing, interpreting, rethinking and reevaluating value-based foundations and cultural institutions. One of the critical issues in academia is its move away from dogmatic axiomatics by identifying the limits of the *common space* of a multitude of various viewpoints, approaches and lines of thinking. To respond to this issue, the following questions need to be answered: How are various viewpoints combined within the context of the common academic community while attaining complementarity? How complementarity can be measured? Beyond what limits does it become impossible? Importantly, even a small departure from convictions widely accepted in academia leads to the need for thorough substantiation and argumentation. A phenomenon such as the subjective organization of academic knowledge as a whole does not contradict the possibility of a dialogue and conventions in the scholarly community, since research studies conducted in any discipline should be harmonized with the general academic worldview, among other things.

According to V. V. Znakov, the outcome of thesaurus understanding can be the picture of what is understood that includes semantic, conceptual and emotional connections [19, pp. 105-119]. Fragmentary, mosaic, incoherent and often logically contradictory understanding within the boundaries of the subjective organization of academic knowledge has value-related overtones and is terminologically defined, which considerably levels out the departure from social and legitimate ideas about the order of social life and from optimal social and academic prospects.

When talking about the educational process in higher education, it is important to define what the subject of understanding should be. The aim of university training is to understand scholarly/theoretic generalizations and ways of resolving practical tasks based on these generalizations. In this regard, theoretical generalizations is what is comes to the fore in the content of materials, rather than information about diverse phenomena under discussion, i.e. phenomenological aspect. Theoretical scholarly generalizations are those essential relationships whose unity, modifications and interactions defines and reconstructs the development of the specificities of this or that area of reality. Awareness and understanding of these theoretical generalizations as being the rationale behind the development and qualitative specificities of a wide range of phenomena form the basis of university training.

The individual selective activity realized in terms of thesaurus understanding in training focuses, above all, on the theoretical scholarly generalizations in the context of subjective significations and values. The thematic principle behind knowledge organization in terms of thesaurus understanding makes it possible, in the modern context, to carry out interdisciplinary and problem-oriented forms of research in a more efficient manner. The distinctive nature of early 21<sup>st</sup>-century scholarly knowledge defines comprehensive research programs resulting in the junction, within the common system, of theoretical and experimental research and of applied and fundamental knowledge as well as the intensification of direct and backward linkages between them. The university student's structured value system does not exclude emotion that form intra-scholarly objectives, values and social values and objectives of general nature. Today, research is carried out into unique, historically developing systems that comprise, as their special component, man himself (V. S. Stepin). Entirely new prospects, positions and capabilities of man in this new world are the major consequence and simultaneously indicator of the above. This is why it the thesaurus paradigm of the

subjective organization of academic knowledge (V. A. Lukov, Vl. A. Lukov, 2008) seems to foster *epistheme* in education as the essence of the general knowledge that has been reached to this date. Resulting from interactions of *all* academic disciplines, *epistheme* manifests itself in all discursive practices and is their code and a system of prescriptions and prohibitions for individuals. In the context of thesaurus understanding in training, *epistheme* poses new methodological questions, which helps to clearly identify the angle at which reality is examined and to secure this particular worldview.

Today, scholars understand that any situation involves people that perceive, understand and evaluate it. At the same time, the modern stage of psychology's evolution gives reason to believe that more integrative entities, based on the transforming structures of individual experiences, should be regarded as units of psyche.

In light of the thesaurus paradigm of the subjective organization of academic knowledge [19], education-related personal development can be, for instance, examined as one of the major processes associated with the formation and appropriation of the subject's thesaurus understanding of himself and of the world. Acquisition of the thesaurus, important in terms of society and values and generated by the subject through its active attribution (the point here is not its automatic acquisition) results in the fact that a person's future – and, probably, current – actions shall be defined through the text imbued with meaning" (Yu. M. Lotman).

The current context raises the particularly evident issue relating to the thesaurus/narrative relationship. A plausible answer to this issue can be found in studies conducted by M. N. Epstein who asserts that "narrative and thesaurus constitute two axes of the linguistic representation of life, and they intersect constantly at each of its points. A specific thesaurus worldview is formed inside narrative, and there is room for life stories inside thesaurus.

Nonetheless, being complementary, the narrative and thesaurus approaches are distinctly different from each other, and this dualism cannot be reduced to monism. One life can be presented from both a narrative and thesaurus perspective, but they are two different ways of representation that cannot be combined or completely reduced to one another. The fullness of thesaurus will always be lost in narrative, and the dynamics of narrative will be equally lost in thesaurus. In many respects, thesaurus is the 'recessive' gene of our biographical culture whereas narrative is the 'dominant' gene [20, p. 45-56].

In examining understanding as a methodological issue in social studies and the humanities, the authors agree with M. N. Epstein's supposition that "the shift of humankind's historical self-consciousness towards thesaurus will be complemented with the shift of personal self-consciousness and a new discursive orientation in the psycho-biographical discourse. The fact that language-centered psychology is still in the process of discovering narratives is understandable and natural, yet it is time to move to the next phase. A huge part of human experiences, both personal and social, remains unknown to us owing to the domination of narrative techniques and lack of developed thesaurus fields... Development of other, complementary methods for its description could provide sense and word to the lives of millions of narratively silent people who have another, i.e. thesaurus, experience in comprehending it" [20, p. 52]. Educators, psychologists, philosophers, culture experts and historians need to carry out serious work to develop thesaurus fields aimed at detailed and deep understanding of separate phenomena and events of the outside world.

As part of the present research aimed at developing understanding among university students within the boundaries of the existential type of reality, attention is given to the establishment of speech formations during early adolescence, including abilities directed at implementing, in a comprehensive and conscious manner, the *terminologization/determinologization* and *metaphorization/demetaphorization* of text; the *conceptualization/deconceptualization* of text, presented in the present study; and, on this basis, the *ontologization/deontologization* of ways of human existence in modern society.

Synthesis and a certain integral unity of all kinds of understanding-relating manners are recorded in the course of ontologization. The process of ontologization includes, at least, two levels: the immanent (inner) one and the transcendent (outside) one. The immanent (inner) level is a combination of various techniques and ways of understanding, directly substantiated by the specific nature of the subject of academic knowledge implemented in the understanding subject's personal peculiarities, the latter being general, specific, isolated and even unique). The transcendent (outside) level includes philosophical, scholarly (empirical, theoretical, logical) and extra-scholarly methods and means, among others.

Therefore, ontologization is a process that forms and develops fundamental attributes of being, of the most common essences and principles of categories of things existent. The ontologization of text in the process of understanding in university student training is a specific means of argument by which the necessity of existence of this or that is derived from thinking about it. Ontologization in the process of understanding in training is the search for relative and accurate elements of cognition. In the subjective approach, the ontologization and deontologization of ways of human existence in modern society is regarded in the light of the formation of '*understanding man*' (*homo intelligens*) rather than as a social individual who is instantly fit for external circumstances. Are the processes of ontologization and deontologization of ways of human existence in society the ultimate form of understanding in training? This question remains open and requires further research.

In conclusion, the construction of the student's promotion model in the processual field of understanding is completed within the boundaries of the existential tradition in psychological research on the basis of ontologization and deontologization. The **object of development** is Individual-world. The **object's structure** is the objectness of culture (a person's inner world and ontological forces). **Presuppositions and conditions** are understanding-problematization of context. **Basic processes** is theoretical thinking in the form of ontologization-deontologization. **Determinants of development** are the production of ways of being. **Mechanisms and driving forces** are the bonding of text's denotative and connotative backgrounds, construction of probabilistic forecasting, posing of theoretical questions and creation of thesaurus episthemes. The **outcome of development** is understanding-cognition.

## V. CONCLUSION

The effect of 'embeddedness' of the structural components of understanding into various traditions in psychological research on understanding in student training within the empirical and sociocultural context are not completed processes, and, supposedly, specific nuances and peculiarities in the construction of the understanding model in training as such will be present in every academic discipline. However, the authors presented a general

approach aimed at ensuring order, indicated a vector for development and provided a number of examples with a view to fostering understanding in student training.

Teaching understanding to students starts with the **object of development**, i.e. Individual-object and continues further with the component defined as Individual-world. The **object's structure** starts with academic knowledge, understood as the acquisition of practical skills and actions of cultural or productive nature and, when teaching ways to work with text. Further, it turns into the search for texts' significations, decoding of the knowledge of speech and cultural practices and the reconstruction of man's spiritual world and concludes with an approach to man's inner world and ontological forces. **Presuppositions and conditions**: understanding-recognition changes, when teaching students work with texts, into understanding-hypothesis, understanding-unification and completes with understanding/problematicization of context. **Basic processes** start with the development of empirical thinking in the form of terminologization/determinologization, change – when teaching students work with texts – from empirical thinking to theoretical thinking in the form of metaphorization/demetaphorization, conceptualization/deconceptualization. The basic development of understanding in student training ends with theoretical thinking in the form of ontologization/deontologization. **Determinants of development** start with verbal and representational explanations by means of transmission, memorization and reproduction of texts subject to understanding, progress though the regulation of significations and end with the production of ways of being. **Mechanisms and driving forces** start to operate when teaching university students the following ways to develop understanding: 1) the textual, associative experiment, posing of empirical questions and elaboration of notions; 2) text modelling, phrasing of question statements, use of hermeneutical techniques ('truth'/'non-truth', 'hermeneutic circle') and production of narrative texts; and 3) the bonding of text's denotative and connotative backgrounds, construction of probabilistic forecasting, posing of theoretical questions and creation of thesaurus episthemes. **Outcome of development**: development progresses through understanding-knowledge and understanding-interpretation and leads to understanding-cognition.

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