

AUTONOMOUS LEARNING – A THEORETICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: *Autonomy is a pedagogical concept with multiple educational dimensions, the most important correlative notions being involvement, freedom of choice, responsibility, critical thinking, and metacognition. Educational autonomy is a pedagogical concept with multiple educational dimensions, important correlative notions being activation, freedom of choice, responsibility, critical thinking, and metacognition. The common teacher-student actions aim to increase the student's autonomy and include the acquisition of meta-knowledge and the use of meta-cognitive strategies, reflection on knowledge, performing self-evaluations and co-evaluations, combining individual activity with cooperative work activities, and mutual exchanges. The student thus contributes responsibly to his own training, (self) training. The autonomy of the student is objectified in the management of the new knowledge, in setting their own goals and strategies of learning and training, in the hierarchy of priorities, in the design of the strategies of (self) monitoring and self-evaluation, in the curricular management, in the time management. Just like self-education, self-training refers to the conscious, voluntary processes, in which the person undertakes actions aimed, consciously, at qualitative transformations, which lead to the development of his own personality. In self-training, "learning to learn" is essential, understood as the assimilation of cognitive/intellectual and metacognitive skills, contributing to the transformation of self-instruction and self-training into a necessity.*

Keywords: *autonomy; autonomous learning; self-education; metacognitive skills; critical thinking.*

Introduction

Educational autonomy is that competence of self-determination that materializes in the freedom of elections and in the responsible realization of one's own actions, in the formation of beliefs and in the internalization of values. (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, Stan, Chiş & Andronache, 2016). It is the student's ability to work independently and have the freedom to do so. Self-directed learning would allow the student to customize their learning program based on academic strengths and personal interests and monitor their own achievements.

Competency-based learning is developed on a teaching-learning system that constantly develops students' autonomy and ability to "learn to learn".

Effective learning is often associated with learning autonomy (Boekaerts, 1999), in the sense that increasing learning efficiency can be achieved in school by cultivating learning autonomy.

What are autonomous learning and autonomy in learning?

According to Holec's definition, 1981, autonomy in learning can be seen as the ability of students to self-conduct their own learning, which means taking responsibility for decisions on different aspects of the learning process. In self-directed learning, learners' choices remain mainly at the level of learning management, i.e. behavioral learning level and self-targeting refer to the practical part of learning such as the selection of learning materials, methods, learning place and time, partners, etc.

Autonomous learning, first of all, means critical thinking, planning and evaluation of learning and reflection, a conscious effort on the part of the learner to continuously monitor the learning process from start to finish (Benson, 2001). This is the cognitive side of autonomous learning.

George Betts & Jolene Kercher, 1999, developed a model of autonomous learning (ALM) with the aim of producing independent and self-directed students. Initially, it was intended for gifted and talented students, but this model can work very well for all categories of students.

By developing an alternative learning curriculum, autonomous learning equips students with "positive skills, concepts and attitudes in the cognitive, emotional, social and physical fields", creating students who self-train and self-develop in the long term (Betts & Kercher, 1999).

The self-learning model outlines 5 different dimensions:

- **Orientation** — students learn about the model of autonomous learning and develop their own learning program.
- **Individual development** — students develop the skills and attitudes they need to become involved in their training and development throughout their lives.
- **Enrichment** — students learn content outside of their school curriculum.
- **Seminars** — students demonstrate their ability to learn and work together in groups, under the guidance of a teacher.
- **In-depth study** — students' study in depth in their research to form themselves throughout their lives, through individual work and through projects, find mentors, and learning is complemented by the assessment of their own learning.

If students are able to be deeply involved in their own learning and training process, to develop and practice metacognitive skills, monitoring, managing and adjusting their learning, then they will become responsible and autonomous in the learning process (Bocoş, 2013).

A student becomes autonomous when:

- one learns on own initiative, in an individual, independent and personalized way, practicing active, independent, divergent, evaluative thinking;
- one is aware that it goes through a learning and training process in a self-taught manner and becomes exclusively responsible for it;
- it reflects on oneself, interacts with oneself, achieves intrapersonal communication, communicates with one's own inner world, researching and understanding oneself, being

mainly aware of how one develops one's own interests and the metacognitive strategies it uses;

- one reflects intensely on what one has to learn and elaborates on the steps one will take in this regard and selects the metacognitive strategies that he will apply;
- one organizes work and advances oneself, interacting with the contents of the learning, with the teacher, with colleagues;
- self-manages and self-monitors the learning situations and activity sequences one faces in a formal, non-formal or informal context, applying metacognitive strategies and practicing metacognitive skills;
- one sets the goals and objectives of learning and the strategies one will apply, becoming aware of the modelling connections between their components: methods and procedures, techniques and tools of work, curricular resources, and ways of self-evaluation;
- engages in learning its entire intellectual, physical, volitional and affective potential, proves active, critical, and creative spirit;
- has significant initiatives in learning and implements them, acts alone or in a group, documents, consults with colleagues and, if necessary, asks for help from the teacher, transfers the acquired acquisitions to new educational contexts;
- has an active, positive educational attitude that favors lifelong learning (Bocoş, 2013).

Autonomy is a goal of active (inter)learning; it can be acquired only when learning itself becomes a process of practicing autonomy, thanks to independent, active, divergent, critical, logical, evaluative thinking, etc. (Bocoş 2013).

According to the "Praxiological Dictionary of Pedagogy", (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, Stan, Chiş, & Andronache, 2016), student autonomy/autonomy in learning represents the competence of self-determination, which develops through pedagogical interaction, and which gives the student freedom of choice and full responsibility for one's own actions in this regard. The autonomous student has his own impulses in terms

of learning and knowledge, formulates his learning goals, responsibly assumes the learning task, and the problem to be solved selects and combines his own resources, chooses his strategies for action, monitoring and evaluation, constructs his own learning and knowledge, and can continue to learn, independently of the help received from the outside (he does not need others).

The joint teacher-student actions have as objective the increase of the student's autonomy and include acquiring meta-knowledge and using metacognitive strategies, reflecting on knowledge, carrying out self-evaluations and co-evaluations, combining individual activity with cooperative work activities, and mutual exchanges. The student thus responsibly contributes to his or her own training, (self) training.

The concept of "self-training" is a complex one, and to define it we use *the "Praxiological Dictionary of Pedagogy"* (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, Stan, & Chiş, 2016). Self-training directed towards cognitive learning, acquiring knowledge, and developing cognitive/intellectual skills represents ***cognitive self-training***. Cognitive self-training presupposes the existence of the knowing subject of clear conceptions about the psychological mechanisms at stake in autonomous learning, the cognitive and metacognitive strategies used, and the metacognitive competencies acquired. In self-training, the "learning of learning" is essential, understood as the assimilation of cognitive/intellectual and metacognitive abilities, it contributes to the transformation of self-training and self-training into a necessity.

The system of individualized, conscious and active approaches assisted or unassisted, of self-socio-construction of becoming, of qualitative transformation of the entire personality, in all levels ***constitutes the educational self-training***. Just like self-education, self-training refers to the conscious, voluntary, intentional, complex processes, within which the person undertakes actions aimed, consciously, at the qualitative transformation, the development of his own personality on different levels (intellectual, moral, social, affective, aesthetic, physical).

In self-training it is essential not so much "to learn", but "*to learn to learn*", "*to learn to become*", and "*to learn to be able*", which determines the modification of the relationship between learning and teaching, as well as the modification of the role of the educator in the transmitter, organizer, coordinator in the mediator, helper, counsellor, tutor, adviser of those who educate themselves. Self-training is a complex process, induced by education, consubstantial to education, a

process parallel to it, which is the expression of its maximum efficiency. The various results recorded in the process of self-training are capitalized by the individual in the process of his own becoming, still setting formative goals, refining his competencies of various types, and identifying effective strategies of social and professional integration.

When self-training is directed towards the formation and development of metacognitive skills or learning to learn and metacognitive behavior, we speak of metacognitive self-training. Metacognitive behavior includes all the reactions and actions that a person performs individually, in order to know his own processes, mental and emotional activities and their products, in order to (self) actively regulate cognitive functioning (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, Stan, Chiş & Andronache 2016, p. 232).

What is not autonomy in learning?

Little (1991) brings some additions to what autonomy is NOT:

- (1) autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher;
- (2) in the context of the class, autonomy does not imply an abdication of responsibility on the part of the teacher; it is not a matter of letting students do their own thing as best as they can;
- (3) autonomy is not another method of teaching;
- (4) autonomy is not a unique, easy-to-describe behaviour;
- (5) autonomy is not a state of balance achieved by learners.

Is autonomous learning a learning process without a teacher?

Little (1990) argues that autonomous learning is not learning on its own account without a teacher.

Little (1991) emphasizes that the autonomy of the student and the autonomy of the teacher are interdependent and that teachers who want to promote greater autonomy of the student must "start with themselves", reflecting on their own beliefs, practices, experiences and expectations regarding the teaching/ learning situation.

Darby (2005) considers the teacher as a decisive teacher in stimulating the participation of students in their learning. The teacher who supports autonomy shapes the self-regulating practices for his class. The

teacher's passion and enthusiasm for his subject can be contagious, increasing the motivation of children's desire to learn. When children are excited to learn, when the environment is optimally created by their teacher to facilitate learning, they will try new strategies and experiment with their ideas independently.

Sierens et al. (2009) found that the support of autonomy from the teacher cultivates the interest of the students and stimulates intrinsic motivation.

Richardson et al. (2014) argues that the way in which a teacher supports autonomy in learning could motivate one to develop autonomous research projects.

The educator plays the role of a contextual facilitator in meeting the needs of the students, states (Hospel & Galand, 2016).

As Skinner et al. declares (2008), autonomy has often been demonstrated as a huge indicator of changes in engagement. If it is fulfilled, autonomy generates constructive emotional, psychological, and behavioral results (Jang et. al., 2012) and is significantly linked to teacher success and, consequently, to student enthusiasm (Derakhshan et al., 2020).

Autonomy support as described by Reeve (2016) refers to the effort to provide instruction in an environment that supports students' demands for autonomy and the educator-learner relationship.

Conclusions

The role of the teaching staff remains an important one in the development of the autonomy of the students they instruct and train. The teacher must not completely give up control of the learning activities. It will establish the limits and benchmarks in which and after which the student can develop independently. The more autonomous the student becomes, the less the teacher's control will be. Respecting students' ideas, sharing teaching decisions, setting learning goals and leading them to take responsibility for their learning rather than prescribing the learning process will all increase student motivation and thus boost their success.

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