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Orginal Article

Students' autonomy from Dearden's point of view: Conceptualizing and Educational Principles

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Abstract

In recent years, "autonomy" has been considered as one of the important goals of educational systems. At the same time, ambiguity about the concept of "autonomy" and its distinction from notions such as arbitrariness or irresponsibility may lead to a form of confusion in practice and may even result in educational fallacies. The present research was done with the purpose of explaining, criticizing and evaluating his analysis of autonomy. This goal is formulated in the form of two questions, the first of which concerns the meaning of autonomy and its conceptual prerequisites, and the second concerns the implications of this concept in the educational space. Thus, first, using the concept analysis approach and in the form of conceptual explanation, evaluation of the conceptual structure, and conceptualization, an attempt was made to evaluate its conceptual structure by analyzing Dirden's perspective on autonomy, and from within this evaluation, Dirden's view of the realization of autonomy is expressed in the form of eight conditions, his perspective is criticized, and in the second stage, the educational implications of this concept are inferred. The findings regarding the first question present us with these conceptual conditions for autonomy: thinking, independence, freedom, originality, coherence of action and thought, and continuous criticism. In response to the second question, the educational principles that can be inferred are as follows: strengthening critical thinking as a basis for continuous critical insight and perspective, strengthening self-knowledge as a basis for originality, granting freedom as a basis for choice and independence, emphasizing holistic thinking as a basis for the coherence of thought and action, a two-way view of freedom/law, a two-way view of institutional truths/individual discoveries and innovations, a gradual approach to the development and emergence of autonomy, and creating intellectual security for students and teachers.

Keywords: Autonomy, Dearden, Freedom, thinking, Originality, Responsibility.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In recent years, "autonomy" has been considered as one of the important goals of educational systems. At the same time, ambiguity about the concept of "autonomy" and its distinction from notions such as arbitrariness or irresponsibility may lead to a form of confusion in practice and may even result in educational fallacies—an issue that could ultimately place the education of future generations at risk. Therefore, various thinkers have tried to clarify the concept of autonomy and its educational requirements. Dearden is one of these thinkers who has tried to provide a proper analysis of the concept of autonomy. What distinguishes Dirden's concept of autonomy from other scholars' concepts is that he has examined autonomy in relation to education and its key elements: the student, the teacher, and the school. But his analysis has been briefly and not criticized. The present research was done with the purpose of explaining, criticizing and evaluating his analysis of autonomy. This goal is formulated in the form of two questions, the first of which concerns the meaning of autonomy and its conceptual prerequisites, and the second concerns the implications of this concept in the educational space. In the other word, we tried to deduce necessary conceptual conditions of it. After that, considering these conceptual conditions, we endeavored to formulate some educational principles for realizing autonomy in educational environments.

Method

The methodological approach used in this research has been the concept analysis approach in the form of conceptual explanation, conceptual structure evaluation and conceptualization. In explaining the concept of autonomy in education, we endeavored to evaluate its conceptual structure based on Deardean's view of it. Upon this, we tried to deduce conceptual necessary conditions of autonomy. In the end, based on this conceptualization and with the approach of implicit inference, suggestions have been made for the realization of educational autonomy.

Results

After analyzing and criticizing Dearden's view on autonomy, eight conditions were obtained as necessary conditions for the realization of autonomy. These conditions are: "thinking", "independence", "freedom", "originality", "coherence of action and thought", and "ceaseless criticism". Moreover, we tried to formulate some educational principles which facilitate

the realization of autonomy in the educational environments. These principles are: "strengthening critical thinking as a basis for constant critical insight", "strengthening self-knowledge as the basis of originality", "giving freedom as the basis of choice and independence", "emphasazing on holistic view as the basis of coherence of thought and action", "reciprocal view of freedom/law", "reciprocal view of institutional facts/individual discoveries or innovations", "gradual approach to development and emergence of autonomy", and "creating intellectual security for students and teachers".

Discussion

Reflecting on Dearden's view of autonomy, we come across questions that can be used to criticize Dearden's conception of autonomy. For example, in rationality, we can distinguish between it and the use of reflective-thinking capabilities. Also, we can say that choosing, cannot be a necessary conceptual condition of autonomy. It can be considered as a providing context for it. Moreover, we can regard responsibility not a conceptual condition but a consequence of it. That is, at the end of autonomy, the autonomous individual should accept the result of her (his) thinking, choice and action and this means her (his) responsibility. In addition to this rejection, the conditions considered by Dirden were also subject to some reconstructions after analysis and evaluation. For example, in the first condition, rationality, his view is not a comprehensive view and he does not consider all the choices of the autonomy to be rational. Therefore, in order to distinguish between rationality and the use of reflective-thinking capabilities, it is better to consider the first condition as thinking and contemplation. Hence, it must be said that not every type of choosing and following oneself can be called autonomy, but only those types of following oneself are called autonomy and are considered as the goal of education and training that have traces of thinking and reflection. This trace separates autonomy from the desire to follow and can embody and elevate human humanity. In addition, conditions such as independence, freedom, and originality seek the independence of the student.

The realization of each of these conditions requires the observance of principles in the process of education. On the one hand, these principles are rooted in the individual and seek to create a space for his independent intellectual and practical development, and on the other hand, they turn to society and establish frameworks for controlling the vagaries and types of autonomy that are free from responsibility. The existence of these frameworks and the individual's disciplined interaction with them leads to the creation of a space for mutual individual and social growth and development. Of course, this interaction will be accompanied by suffering

and torture, and the teacher and student must accept difficulties and challenges to realize it. Without this mutual acceptance and recognition, we will face the formation of "passive resistance" of students, and we may need to expect the failure of the school.

The important suggestion of this article is to familiarize teachers with the concept of autonomy and the conditions and principles that make it possible.

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