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A Reflection on the Place of Students' Sense of Wonder in the Classroom: An Exploration of Primary School Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This research aimed to reflect on the position of students' sense of wonder in the classroom by exploring the perspectives of elementary school teachers. To achieve the research goal, a systematic qualitative approach and grounded theory method have been used. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers were conducted until the data were saturated. An in-depth analysis of qualitative data using thematic coding led to the discovery and classification of three main themes and eleven sub-themes, including the constituent factors encompassing the dimensions of teachers, parents, schools, and curricula; barriers to growth and development involving dimensions of reduced connection with nature, dominance of the technological world, the nature of new education, and attitudes towards the world; and finally, the category of the consequences of cultivating a sense of wonder, encompassing educational-pedagogical, emotional-affective, and spiritual dimensions. In terms of the level of importance and the criterion of repetition in the perspective of participants, the role and position of the teacher holds the highest credibility. Ultimately, this research, while possessing the capability of raising awareness, can serve as a practical guide for evoking a sense of wonder in the classroom. Additionally, educational policymakers can implement appropriate conditions and educational policies to strengthen and institutionalize these dimensions.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

It seems that as the process of education in school, instead of focusing on all dimensions of the student's existence, adopts a reductionist approach to the truth of humanity, many important aspects of the educational process will be forgotten. Undoubtedly, one of the obvious results of one-dimensional education will be the realization of a type of cold, soulless, mechanical, and tedious education. One of the contexts for the emergence of such educations is the lack of a sense of wonder in the methods of teaching. The results stem from focusing on a part of human existential abilities while ignoring other significant parts.

Method

To achieve the research goal, a systematic qualitative approach and grounded theory method have been used. In order to collect data, semistructured interviews and document review were used, and for sampling, a mixed purposeful sampling method (combination of theoretical sampling, snowball, and criterion sampling) was used. The participants of the research were primary school teachers in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province during the 2023-2024 academic year. In the present study, data saturation was reached through semi-structured interviews with 8 teachers, but to enhance the credibility of the findings, the interview process continued until 11 individuals were interviewed. Ultimately, the sample size studied was 11 individuals. Interviews were conducted based on distance, in both face-to-face and remote formats. The duration of each interview varied between 50 to 60 minutes. In this research, a thematic coding method was used to analyze the findings.

Results

The qualitative findings identified three main themes: contextual factors, barriers to fostering a sense of wonder, and the consequences of fostering a sense of wonder. According to the participants' views, 'contextual factors' was the most prominent theme regarding importance and frequency. Within this theme, the 'teacher' sub-theme was especially significant. The results suggest that the factors facilitating the development of a sense of wonder operate through an interactive and networked process, directly shaping students' experiences. Teachers ranked these factors in order of importance as: teachers, parents, school, and curriculum. The second theme, 'barriers to fostering a sense of wonder,' identifies obstacles that negatively hinder the development of this sense in students. This theme consists of four sub-themes—reduced connection with nature, technological dominance, the evolving nature of education, and worldviews—listed in descending order of importance. The third theme, identified through teacher interviews, explores the multi-dimensional outcomes of fostering a sense of wonder. It includes three sub-themes: educational-pedagogical, emotional-affective, and spiritual, also ranked by descending importance. Ultimately, fostering a sense of wonder serves as a testament to holistic education, which addresses the student's cognitive, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

Discussion

Drawing from the holistic perspective of this research and the qualitative analysis of teachers' insights, several key points emerge that hold significant educational value. These observations could lead to a fundamental reassessment of how we understand the 'sense of wonder. The first point concerns the role of the 'teacher.' This was the most frequent and important theme. According to teachers, the most essential competency is having a clear understanding of the purpose and importance of wonder in education. Creating a curriculum that fosters wonder depends on a

teacher's skills and pedagogical insight. Since wonder is not explicitly emphasized in formal educational goals, many teachers lack a clear direction in this area. Furthermore, the teacher's effectiveness is shaped by school policies, institutional flexibility, and the principal's leadership philosophy. The second point emphasizes that wonder should be nurtured in both adults and children, especially in early childhood. Experiences in nature and a positive worldview can foster wonder even before the preschool years. However, teachers noted that parents often overlook the educational benefits of nature. Interestingly, while parents may be skeptical of nature's role, they tend to view heavy technology use as a positive sign of intelligence. In truth, wonder is a powerful catalyst for holistic learning. The third point addresses a common misconception. The interviews suggest that some educators feel caught in a paradox regarding the use of wonder. They ask: Is there a conflict between a sense of wonder and academic achievement? The reality is that these two are not contradictory. By creating child-centered environments, teachers can design meaningful, project-based, and real-world learning experiences. Therefore, integrating a sense of wonder into the classroom is entirely achievable. Ultimately, this research, while benefiting from the capability of raising awareness, can serve as a practical guide for stimulating a sense of wonder in the classroom through the obtained concepts. Additionally, educational policymakers can implement appropriate educational conditions and policies to strengthen and institutionalize these dimensions.

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Ethical Approval: This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The privacy and anonymity of the participants have been strictly maintained.