IMPLICATIONS OF AUTONOMY IN LEARNING MANAGING IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

J. L. Martins[1]; B. Silva[2]

[1] Prof. no curso de Jornalismo e no Programa Pós-graduação em Ensino de Ciências e Saúde da Universidade Federal do Tocantins. Palmas -TO, Brasil, [2] Instituto de Educação - Universidade do Minho, Braga – Portugal
jlauro@uft.edu.br - bento@ie.uminho.pt

ABSTRACT

The concept of autonomy presented by several authors regards proactivity of learners to access, browse, search content, meet the demands of the teachers. Our question is: is it enough to understand that this or that learner is autonomous? To deepen this debate we asked 10 teachers who worked in an online postgraduate course graduate to appoint elements in order to identify the level of autonomy of learners in learning process. With the responses analysis, it is understood that autonomy cannot be considered purely instrumental and should be part of training strategies.

KEY-WORDS: Autonomy; online education, learning management.

IMPLICAÇÕES DA AUTONOMIA NA GESTÃO DA APRENDIZAGEM EM AMBIENTE VIRTUAL

RESUMO

O conceito de autonomia apresentado por diversos autores diz respeito á proatividade dos aprendentes para acessar, navegar, buscar os conteúdos, responder as demandas dos professores. Nossa pergunta é: isso é suficiente para entender que este ou aquele aprendente é autônomo? Para aprofundar esse debate fizemos solicitamos a 10 professores que atuaram em um curso de pós-graduação online o que eles elencariam para identificar o grau de autonomia dos aprendentes em relação ao processo de aprendizagem. A partir da analise das respostas, propomos que a autonomia não pode ser considerada apenas instrumental e que deve fazer parte das estratégias formativa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Autonomia, educação online, gestão da aprendizagem.

1. Introduction

Autonomy is one of the aspects of student training implicit in learning process and in the student development, but it is rarely objectively treated in school curriculum. As a principle there is no training process that does not have as an intention making the student more autonomous for life and for society. What we question is that being something intrinsic to training and to what society expects from all citizens, why not to treat this issue objectively? Moreover, does the school management and methodologies actually contribute to the construction and the appropriation of autonomy? These are questions that have intrigued us, about which we seek to reflect in this article, based on elements of a study carried out in learning management in a Specialization Course.

We consider construction and appropriation of autonomy is one of the training and paradigmatic aspects and due the exercise of the individual acting without the direct support of another person in any reality. It is understood, however, that it is necessary to distinguish who plays which role in the learning process. Thus, while in teaching management the central role is played by the teacher in the learning management the action is mostly accomplished by the student, with the collaboration of several agents that cooperate so that the ability of self-control is developed by him.

2. Appropriation of autonomy

Autonomy is always related to the power that the individual plays, thus an educational process that aims at the construction and the appropriation of autonomy enables the empowerment of the individual. In such terms, Michel Foucault writes that, classically, power was considered to be something emanating from a source to the ends, in other words, power may be a concession from someone with more power that gives it another below scaled (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). Thus, power gives "autonomy" to some and obedience to others. His concern was with the structure of this kind of power exercise, in other words, the ends of power. Furthermore, to the author power is something that circulates and it is not located somewhere, only networked because it passes through agents who exercise it and chain feed (Foucault, 1979, p. 183).

If we observe the sense of power in the traditional school we see teacher as a representative of the power granted to him. Their autonomy is directly related to their authority. But as a democratic, shared management is proposed the monocratic power loses ground because it becomes subjected to the decision of a group, a council or coordination. Further, as the content that endorse the authority of teachers are available to students through various means and they do not depend exclusively on teacher to access them, part of their authority is also dispersed.

Teacher autonomy exercised as an authority in relation to content and the pedagogical practice is diluted because students have access to other sources and ways of learning. It can be said that there is, then, a disempowerment of teacher in the traditional sense, because as new teaching ways in network are developed there is also a redefinition of autonomy and teacher authority. Happens to be another form of autonomy that is not restricted to the teacher, but an autonomy that is taken by management of networked learning. So, the teacher authority, related to their ability to exercise the dynamics of the network while the students take autonomy in the learning network (Martins & Silva, 2016).

In order to understand the concept of autonomy, Paiva (2006, pp. 80-88) presents a set of fifteen definitions that help to understand how autonomy has been understood, although not always

discussed objectively in academic education. The author (2006, p. 90) presents a summary of twelve points with different aspects of autonomy, which we will refer to:

1. Autonomy involves inherent or learned ability;
2. Autonomy involves self-confidence and motivation;
3. Autonomy involves the use of individual learning strategies;
4. Autonomy is a process that is manifest to varying levels;
5. The levels of autonomy are not stable and may vary depending on internal or external conditions;
6. Autonomy depends on the willingness of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning;
7. Autonomy requires awareness of the learning process;
8. Autonomy is closely related to metacognitive strategies: planning/decision making, monitoring and evaluating;
9. Autonomy embraces social and individual dimensions;
10. The teacher can help the learner to be autonomous both in the classroom and outside of it;
11. Autonomy inevitably involves a change in power relations;
12. Promoting learner autonomy must take into account the psychological, technical, social and political dimensions.

It is clear, therefore, that the issue of autonomy must be understood in its complexity as part of the training expected by society and not just as part of the instrumental ability of individuals. This instrumentality of the individual, as a feature of autonomy is very present in studies on technology-mediated education, as it appears in the glossary of the work of Moore and Keasley (2012, p. 308) when they present a direct relationship between "the distance of the relationship" and a "need for autonomy" Moore e Keasley (2012, p. 308)

> Concept that people have capacities for making decisions regarding what, how, and to what extent they learn. People differ in these capacities but they can be developed, and their exercise is particularly beneficial when instructors are at a distance. The greater the transactional distance, the greater the need for learner autonomy. In transactional distance theory, programs can be classified according to the degree of learner autonomy exercised.

What is clear is that the concern with the autonomy of these authors due to the geographical distance between students and teachers when providing time for study, accessing the contents, studying and seeking teachers when needed depended on student initiative (Parker, 2015). Therefore, there is talk of a problem that would be solved through classroom teaching, it is an instrumental autonomy but not necessarily a cognitive one.

We, however, agree with Paiva (2006, p. 88) when he states that autonomy is not just a matter of taking responsibility for their own learning, not something "given" by the approach or tolerated by the teacher. It is something much more complex. The focus of our discussion is the construction of the student's autonomy in relation to their critical ability to understand and intervening in the world. Circumstantially, we believe that autonomy is implicit in learning management of learning and especially in online courses, as Freire (1983, p. 16)) stated that only truly learns the one who takes what is learned, turning it into seized, with what he can, for this reason, reinvent it; the one who is able to apply the seized learned into concrete existential situations.

This is why in the learning management the autonomy can not be regarded as a concession or as a need related to a certain situation. Especially because the student in a classroom course is with the teacher for little time and that time is still used for content delivery and very little guidance about learning or knowing the history of student's life. It is understood that autonomy is the elementary contribution of the educational process for students to develop the ability to consciously intervene in society. This way, the educator assuming themselves as also subject of the production of knowledge, will definitely be convinced that teaching is not transferring knowledge but creating the possibilities for its production or construction (Freire, 1996, p. 12).

In other words, learning can lead to the appropriation of autonomy directly when teaching aims to stimulate research and promotion of learning networks. When allows contrary thinking and it is not limited to teaching management restricted to invent problems that students do not recognize and solve them without having been questioned. Teaching driven by the learning management requires the active participation of students in the "invention" of the problems, which implies less teacher activity for solving and increased autonomy appropriation by students (Downes, 2012, p. 435).

3. Method

Aims

Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT), during 2010/2011, offered the Specialization Course in Pedagogical Coordination (CECP), conducted under the National Program of Managers Schoolof Basic Education, from the Ministry of Education through the Department of Education. 400 teachers were registered, from 83 of the 139 cities (60%) of the State of Tocantins, who were divided into 10 groups, each group with a responsible tutor. For this study we intended to know what the 10 teachers of the course expected of these students and what would be their relationship to the construction of autonomy.

Sample

For this study it was decided to analyze the point of view of 10 teachers responsible for classes regardin the discussion on the content of students training and the autonomy construction process.

Instruments

It was used a questionnaire with three open and one with multiple choice questions. For this analysis we focused on the question that asked teachers to indicate aspects that identify the level of students' autonomy in relation to the learning process.

Procedures

The questionnaire was available on the Internet and all the teachers were invited to participate in the study over a period of 30 days. Then we downloaded all the answers and preceded the content analysis (Bardin, 2011) in order to point the assertions objectively, generating a list of topics organized into four categories: mastery in technology, proactivity, ability to read and write, and mastery in methodology.

4. Results

We now present the topics from the responses organized into categories, followed by comments.
- *M*astery in technology
  - Progressive interaction with the environment tools;
  - Attendance in the forums;
  - Socialization of pertinent questions in the forums;
  - Productive comments on the forums.

The questions presented in this category are directly related to the communication strategy used in the course, in study forums or group integration, in accordance with the guidelines of Silva (2006, p. 72) emphasizing that participation in forums is part of the quantitative and quality assessment process.

Being proactive

- o Being participative;
- o Being collaborative;
- o Performance in activities posted in the virtual environment;
- o Identification of learning opportunities;
- o Discipline of access and studies.

Proactivity is one of the most expected conditions of a student applying for an online course, and even a synonym of autonomy in learning management. And because even with good content, a well designed environment and teachers who actually know how to work online, the student must take the initiative to access the course, browse on available resources and interact in a way so he can constitute the learning network. This is a common difficulty, because there is still a strong presence of the pedagogy of transmission - where students sit in the classroom and wait for the incentives from teacher - contradicting what is expected of students and teachers online.

- • Ability to read and write
  - o Improvement in sending text messages and posts according to academic standards;
  - o Quality of online participation;
  - o Progressive improvement in text production;
  - o Improving in the writing of the suggested activities.

Common category for online courses for being an instrumental competence with autonomy. The online courses are strongly referenced for reading and writing, not only texts but also various languages that digital technology offers in online environments. In other words, studying online may be more demanding in this aspect, because if the student does not have a good mastery of reading and writing he will have more difficulty to take multiliteracy that can be used online.

- • *M*astery in methodology
  - o Improvement of interventions and postures in presential meetings;
  - o Coordination of studies with daily teaching practice;
  - o Research for further information;
  - o Appropriation of course material.

The mastery in methodology is specifically related to the course that was the object of study. Although the above topics are not exclusive to the course concerned, there was a clear reference to what was expected for the students to have a truly, mainly instrumental autonomy. It can be observed that there is an understanding of what is the exercise of autonomy in learning management and even a desire that students exercise their autonomy.

5. Discussion

All abilities that teachers indicated as important for the exercise of autonomy, as indicated in results, were considered necessary in the context of the course. But first, it is necessary to question the the training that students in this course had. Since they come from a predominantly traditional education it becomes difficult to find the competences and abilities that teachers indicated in their responses. The traditional way of teaching identified by Freire (1979) as "banking education" does not significantly contribute to the construction of autonomy and creativity, instead, it may contribute to a culture of passivity and compliance. Freire says (1979, p. 20) that the student passively receives knowledge becoming a deposit of the educator. He is

educated to save what is deposited. But the curious thing is that the filed is man himself, who thus loses their power to create, making themselves less of a man, it is a part. Man's destiny should be to create and transform the world, being the subject of its action.

According to Shor and Freire (1986, p.78) the symbolic violence of the authorities, in day-to-day and in school, tries to teach people to give up on their rights to autonomy and critical thinking. They also point out that there is a "culture of silence" in established schools by the devaluation of subjectivity and actions of students, and that this "symbolic violence" is countered by a "culture of sabotage" by the students.

It is necessary much caution in online courses because, in theory, it is a way to structured learning from the "silence". It is up to educators to create conditions and have the sensitivity to "hear" the resignations of activities, the excuses as justification, the long absencesthe lack of practical examples on exercises and to create channels that allow students to claim without constraints. The silence in virtual environments may be the result of a "banking education" mediated by digital technologies.

Freire (1979, p. 21), analyzing the "banking education," said those who advocate this form of teaching think the more you give more you know. But experience shows that with this system only mediocre individuals are formed, when there is no incentive for creation. In fact, this teaching strategy refutes any proposal that implies the construction of autonomy by not putting the knowing individual in the center of the process. In this case, there may be students very well assessed but not having a good social performance because there was no effective learning but a rote memorization of contents. Is worth remembering that memorization is a tool for the learning process, but it is not the learning itself. In this case, the "banking education" as set out by Paulo Freire, would contribute to maintain mediocrity by not stimulating creativity.

Fonseca (1998, p. 315) recalls that teachers accuse students of not having consistent training actions and therefore it would interfere with the conduction of autonomous learning management. However, according to the author, the teacher is the instructor of the future and has the obligation to prepare students to think, to learn how to be flexible, in other words, to be able to survive in our village of accelerated information. Therefore, it is the role of educators to plan their training activities with the focus on mediation and education process so that the teaching role connect to the availability of content and the interests and needs of learners.

We do not take the importance of content, even because it is the raw material for knowledge construction, but it is necessary to review the aims and methods for valuing learning. Thus, it is understood that teaching will contribute to the construction of autonomy of thought and learning self-regulation. However, the contents systematized in textbooks need to be seen as a source of information that disputes space with so many other sources. This diversity brings different challenges for teachers and exposes the student to new challenges for the construction of learning. As strange or challenging as it may seem to the teachers trained through manuals, this "lack of logic" in unstructured information requires students to learn how to learn in order to be able to continue the knowledge construction. Moreover, today's society demands from students to be able to develop strategies to solve unforeseen facts, uncertainties or unexpected with the information available and the scope of their learning competencies (Morin, 2001). Thus, it can be said that autonomy is built through the learning process and is an exercise of power activation through the knowledge and the ability to use them today.

Within this context we consider that the formal educational process has a responsibility to contribute objectively to the construction of competences for autonomous learning management. This is not just a bet on individual competences to access, organize, process and use information for their social participation, but a social development of the individual that

school can and have the duty to participate objectively. That is, the autonomy talks of an emancipated relationship, full with the different dimensions of life, which involves intellectual, moral, emotional and socio-political aspects. Although in school is highlighted autonomy in relation to knowledge - knowing what you want to know, how to seek information and possibilities to develop such knowledge, maintain a critical stance comparing different views reserving for yourself the right to conclusion, for example - it does not occur without the development of moral (ethics capacity) and emotional autonomy involving self-respect, mutual respect, sensitivity, security.

As shown in this topic, the definitions as the basis of the discourse for the concept of autonomy are quite diverse. According to the readings presented, autonomy is distinguished into three levels according to the use of this concept in the discourse about education and its appropriation as part of the learning process:

(1) Instrumental - the autonomy of students in online courses is a circumstantial need that can even be a course requirement. Thus, the instrumental autonomy is the most widespread among researchers of education and technology as it is a desire of teachers that students have the initiative and can access and carry out their activities without the insistence of teachers.

(2) Conceptual cognitive development - autonomy is pictured as the effort and the ability to take concepts that are part of the training materials. Once understood, it can be used in certain activities and forgotten, in this case it it does not constitute a proper learning, or associate with knowledge already acquired and become part of the *corpus* of student;

(3) Critical – the deepest level in the the learning process, the one we call critical capacity provided by student. In this case, there is no safe way of assessing that could "measure" critical autonomy, considering that even the student himself really knows *what* and *how much* he learned, but it is the basis for their worldview.

6. Closing remarks

The analysis of results of this study support the view that autonomy should be appropriated as a constitutive factor of the learning process and not just as a pedagogical matter to mediation in online education. It should be a guiding principle of learning, to be established at all stages of the educational process. It is not expected students to be already autonomous, autonomy is a construction that should be part of the learning management while rhizome axis that forms the pedagogical proposal.

The competencies and abilities provided in an educational project should be geared to the learning process, which seems redundant, but the vices of guiding the educational process for the management of teaching easily submits the learning process to administrative issues, making it difficult and even impeding appropriation of autonomy. Moreover the appropriation of autonomy may allow cognitive conflicts that in a centralized in teaching way would not arise. However, it is understood that autonomy is not born of lack of directivity, but from the awareness of rights and duties of an active member of social life (Dubreucq, 2010, p. 33).

Thus, the quality of learning is not conditioned to the absence of cognitive conflict or any other difficulty, but the way we participate and engage students in the challenges experienced.

References

Bardin, L. (2011). Análise de conteúdo (4 ed.). (L. A. Barreto, Trad.) Lisboa, Portugal: Edições 70.
Downes, S. (2012). Connectivism and Connective Knowledge: Essays on meaning and learning networks. (N. R. Canada, Ed.) Canada.

Dubreucq, F. (2010). Jean-Ovide Decroly. (J. F. Carlos Alberto VieiraCoelho, Trad.) Recife: Massangana.

Fonseca, V. d. (1998). Aprender a aprender: Educabilicade cognitiva. Porto Alegre: Artmed.

Foucault, M. (1979). Microfísica do poder. (R. Machado, Ed.) Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

Freire, P. (1979). Educação e Mudança (12 ed.). São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (1983). Extensão ou comunicação? (7 ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (1996). Pedagogia da autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Guimarães, Á. M. (2010). Novos regimes de ver, ouvir e sentir afetam a vida escolar. Educação, 35, pp. 413-430.

Martins, J. L. (2014). A gestão da aprendizagem em ambiente virtual. Tese de doutoramento, Universidade do Minho, Instituto de Educação, Braga; Portugal. .

Martins, J. L., & Silva, B. (2016). Narrativas da dependência nas redes de aprendizagem online: Como os professores usam as redes de aprendizagem para promover a autonomia. Holos, 16-30. http://dx.doi.org/10.15628/holos.2016.4002 .

Moore, M., & Kearsley, G. (2007). Educação a distância: uma visão integrada. (R. Galman, Trad.) São Paulo: Thomsn Learning.

Morin, E. (2001). Os sete saberes necessários à educação do futuro. (C. E. Silva, & J. Sawaya, Trads.) São Paulo: Cortez Editora.

Paiva, V. L. (2006). Autonomia e complexidade. Linguagem & Ensino, 9(1), 77-127.

Parker, G. (May de 2015). Teachers' autonomy. Research in Education, 93, pp. 19-33. http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/RIE.0008.

Shor, I. &. (1986). Medo e Ousadia – O Cotidiano do Professo. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Silva, M. (2006). Educação online: Teorias, práticas, legislação, formação corporativa (2 ed.). São Paulo: Loyola.