HEUTAGOGY (SELF-DETERMINED LEARNING): NEW APPROACH TO STUDENT LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The idea of self-determined learning of students is quite prevalent at least from the times of Rousseau. This paper presents innovative teacher education heutagogy (self-determined learning) courses (250 students). The students chose what to learn in the context of the main course subject, with whom (individually or in small groups), how to learn, from what resources and how to present the knowledge they had constructed. The data were collected from students' written blogs and students' products and was analyzed by collaborative self-study and multiple case-study methods. Findings demonstrated how the students and the lecturers cope with challenges like uncertainty and vagueness and turn them into meaningful learning which enhance their passion for knowledge and pleasure in learning. At the first stages of the courses most of the students felt helplessness about acting in total autonomy setting. As oppose to conventional courses, the students expressed senses of self-competence and capability and self-autonomy.*

Keywords: *Heutagog; teacher education; autonomy;*

"I feel as someone who was received a blank paper, paintbrush, paints, markers and scissors… started to draw a line, then more lines without pre -planning about what will come next… The picture became to be clearer and then a storm arrived and erase everything… the paper became to be blank again…I started to paint again… The creating wind blow and everyone look at it differently, sometimes it is a cloud and sometimes it is a house." (taken from reflection of a teacher education college student following his participating in heutagogy course)

1. Introduction

In the 21st century we face changes in the way knowledge is organized, distributed and learned. These changes can strongly influence the learning processes in educational systems. In an era where organized knowledge is not only a tree-like structure, the classic pedagogies, including those based on constructivist psychology, are no longer effective. It is essential to develop innovative pedagogies and to surround them with learning environments suited to the students who spend (learn) many hours, almost 24/7, facing various types of screens. These learning environments are based upon the premise of self-learning (Davidson & Goldberg, 2009;2010).

2. Theoretical Framework

The idea of self-determined learning of students is quite prevalent at least from the times of Rousseau. However, it had been usually addressed from a psychological point of view (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). The pedagogical impact of its implementation is barely discussed. Hase and Kenyon (2000;2013) have developed an approach called heutagogy or self-determined learning. This educational method hypothesizes that learning is related to weaving connections in the brain, and involves ideas, emotions and experiences that bring the student to a new understanding of himself and the world. They maintain that learning occurs in a haphazard and chaotic manner, as a response to individual needs.

Heutagogy, based on ideas of Carl Rogers (1969), is described by Hase and Kenyon as "occurring in situations where the focus is "on what and how the student wants to learn, and not on what he is taught" (Hase & Kenyon 2013 p.7). To explain this approach, they compare it to two other alternatives: pedagogy and andragogy. In pedagogy, the teacher steers the students on their way, determining the route of their learning, its contents and its pace, since he knows what is good for them. Similarly, in andragogy, which deals with teaching adults, the teacher is responsible for the learning and keeps in mind the students' age, experience and desires. These two types present processes in which the teacher determines what and how the students will learn (teacher-centred learning). In heutagogy, the learner takes upon himself to lead his own learning topic, aims, process, and evaluation (Blaschke and Hase, 2016). Blaschke and Hase (2016) claim that successful heutagogy requires an environment that will allow the students to wander and reflect about the contents of learning, the learning process, its impact (double-loop reflection) and themselves as learners (triple-loop reflection).

Hase and Kenyon (2013) emphasize that heutagogy enhances the students' autonomy, their passion to expand their knowledge and their enjoyment in learning by establishing their sense of capability.

The objective of the present research is to study our (the authors) heutagogy courses, and especially their pedagogical impact on the students who experienced them in a college of education, in order to improve our practice as heutagogy facilitators.

3. The Intervention

3.1. Setting, participants and courses' contents

For two years, six heutagogy courses (approximately 250 students) had been studied in a teacher college of education. Each author taught different courses. The courses' subjects were varied (e.g. Ethics and Philosophy of Education, Youth Cultures, and Teachers' Phronetical Knowledge).

3.2. The course stages

Although each course is a little different from the others, all courses maintain the fundamental pedagogical stages: An introduction, the self-determined learning and the presentation of learning.

3.2.1. An introduction

The introduction session first aim was to expose the students to the subject of the course in a way which intends to increase their curiosity, interest and motivation to learn more about it. The second aim was to introduce the rationale of self-determined learning.

3.2.2. The self-determined learning

In this stage the students as individuals or as groups had been asked: a) to choose a topic which relates to the course subject in order to learn about it; b) to initiate the process of self-determined learning as individuals or in groups and to make their own decisions concerning questions such as: from what and from who I'll learn (What will be the learning sources)? How do I learn (What will be the strategies)? How do we organize our group learning and our work division (if it is a group); c) to construct pre-expectations (i.e. personal or group contract) for self-formative evaluation by coping with questions such as: How can I know that we will experience a meaningful learning process? How can we know that we will construct appropriate knowledge? What will be the indications for these?

During this stage we, the lecturers, played the role of facilitators who help individuals/groups in thinking about how to cope with their learning challenges.

We invited the students to discussions meetings (at least 2-3 meetings with each group or individual) to share their learning process including their difficulties and challenges in order to discuss about it. We tried to avoid giving the students instructions, and instead, we helped them to ask questions for thinking and invited them to think by saying for example: "O.K. let's think together how to cope with this difficulty".

3.2.3. presentation of learning and evaluation

At the end of the courses, each individual or group chose how to present her/their learning and/or its products/outcomes during a different setting such as 10 minutes presentation, academic works or exhibitions of products or activities.

Each individual or group were asked to take a part in the evaluation of her/their own learning process and the knowledge she/they had been constructed, relating to her/their pre-expectations. In addition, we, the lecturers evaluated the students' learning by following our meeting discussions with them, their written reflections and their presentations.

4. Methodology

The present research is a collaborative self-study research (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 2014; Ritter, 2018) combined with multiple cases (Mudrak and Zabrodska, 2015). Heutagogy courses in teacher-education programs provided the cases as "an innovative program may be a case" (Stake, 1995, p.2).

Data were collected from: a) the students' on-going reflections in e-mails and blogs during their learning process, including their final reflections at the end of the courses (about 500 reflections); b) The authors' reflections and discussions.

The data were analyzed by identifying similar patterns of reflections (categories) within cases (courses) and between cases in cross-sectional analysis. First, each author independently analyzed the data from his courses (within), then, both collaboratively analyzed by comparing our self-findings. The results illustrate the shared patterns we found.

5. Results

5.1. Coping with autonomy

In the beginning of the self-determined stage most of the students felt helplessness about acting in a total freedom setting.

Two students wrote that they didn't believe they would really experience a true freedom and expressed some suspiciousness. More students wished to know how they would get their grades, the lecturer's exact expectations, and the implicit intentions of the lecturer. Many felt confused and looked for specific instructions of what and how to learn. Some didn't know how to choose a topic or how to look for different learning resources and some were not used to learning in a group. A few students expressed difficulties regarding learning without frequent deadlines and tasks. One student reported that her ongoing difficulty that bothers her:

"Still something in my mind refuses to be open… waiting for clear instructions, directions, rules… without too much thinking… it still bothers me." (S- first letter of the student's name)

However, most of the students wrote they finally coped with the difficulties and turned it into new opportunities:

"I understood that things are not always clear and explicit, and this gave me a chance to be developed." (A)

"I believe that this confusion enables me to think creatively… It fires me the light of curiosity." (D)

One student struggled with internal ethical issues:

"I think that the first thing I did when I understood that we got almost full autonomy is creating self-expectations: How much effort I will devote to the learning? How do I keep myself from translating the autonomy I received to laziness?... I'm happy I succeeded in not surrendering to my negative impulses." (V)

5.2. Meaningful learning

Most of the reflections described students' sense of meaningful learning:

"This way of learning simulates the uncertain way of life." (W)

Students described that meaningful learning occurred when they were activated and involved in their learning. They felt the powerful sense of autonomy, self-efficacy and being trusted:

"At last someone trust me by giving me to decide how to act and learn… these are the skills I was expected to develop." (E)

Reflections demonstrated students' sense of responsibility:

"I felt the experience of taking responsibility without any inspection, and it strengthened me. I found myself thirsty to knowledge." (A)

5.3. Learning as wandering

Students described the beneficial effect of letting them choose from what sources they would learn:

"In my research process I shot in all directions. This was difficult.... I read books, papers (if I had not read them, I wouldn't have understood the roles of all the people in the system). I learned from observations. It was important for me to know how the child behaves in his natural environment. I connected with experts and professional people who already had rich experience. I learned to take responsibility. It felt like a self-production." (R)

Such searching demonstrates the student's learning as 'wandering in networks. Whenever students wrote about losing their way (e.g. "It wasn't clear where I should go in the process"), they conducted such learning to find possible ways:

"Following the process, I found myself very curious and just wished to get more and more information about the topic… I found myself drawn to read research on my leisure time…I felt I was in a race to read more and more… I promised myself to keep investing and going deeper when the course is over… I was very excited, and a lot of questions echoed in my head. Sometimes, in the middle of the night I turned on my mobile phone and wrote the questions that were raised in my mind. "(W)

"I wandered back in time, and thought about the people who inspired me, who were meaningful teachers for me and why/" (G)

 "I started with a specific point and discovered that I had to study more aspects and points of view." (F)

5.4. Intrinsic motivation

Some students reported about their intrinsic motivation:

"It fires me the light of curiosity." (D)

Few students described their discovery of enjoyment from learning for its own sake. Most students described what they learned about themselves as learners through triple-loop reflections:

"During the year I learned some lessons. First and foremost is that I still don't know enough about myself. Second, I learned that there are a million topics that I wish to learn, and

third, that the learning process is more meaningful for me when I am asked to choose my learning topic." (V)

5.5. Team-work

Students emphasized the opportunities to exercise the development of team-work skills of collaboration and cooperation including interpersonal communication, searching for relevance information sources, asking for help, convincing others by presenting good arguments and making common decisions:

"We sat many hours, alone and together, trying to understand what we read." (L)

"The group collaborative thinking increased the level of the learning when each of us brought different point of view and ideas, and we discussed them and had to make compromises until making decisions." (V)

Few students mentioned problematic issues experienced in group's learning:

"Sometimes, when you give the responsibility to the students and enable them to work in small groups, unpleasant situations may happen when someone stay alone. I want to tell you about someone who really get heart." (A)

5.6. Understanding of courses' processes and subjects

Most of the students emphasized that they gained a deep understanding of the courses' process and subjects (including examples of transfer to other theoretical and practical issues). S. wrote she learned how "to be accurate in order to be able to go deep into the subject she decided to investigate".

"The process I underwent caused me to look at the children differently. Hence, their learning yielded more understandings about relations than about conceptual generalizations." (A)

"I hope to take it to my teaching and invite my students to learn about things that fascinate them and make them curious... I wish to enable them to enjoy learning and to grow with it, as I did… to be there for them in the background and to respect their choices. I experienced a sense of self-efficacy…I feel I can trust my students to learn to choose the best". (H)

6. Conclusions and Implications

The results show that most of the students in all courses experienced sense of autonomy and capacity, learning as wandering, and more symmetrical (non-hierarchical) and dialogical interactions with the lecturers and their groups' peers. They learned about themselves as learners and change their paradigm about meaning of learning. They learned how to lead themselves, to cope with self-determined learning challenges, and to use the advantages of collaborative and cooperative learning in a small group.

The study has some implications to teacher education and education in general. It seems that heutagogy approach enhance students' intrinsic motivation for learning and reduce the gap between the formal learning in educational systems and the natural learning in the real world.

Lot of our students who already work as teachers tell us how they initiate heutagogy in their classes. They report about their own and their students' enthusiasm during teaching-learning processes.

Further research could deepen our understanding of the suitable of heutagogy to the 21th century students learning in general.

Heutagogy goes against the current. Does it have a chance to be more than an isolated and peripheral phenomenon in teacher education?

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