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The Construction of Personal Autonomy. A study with Spanish students of secondary education

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Contribution

The Construction of Personal Autonomy. A study with Spanish students of secondary education

In this paper we will be dealing with the relevance of first hand (personal) experiences for the construction of personal autonomy. In order to do so we will analyse the existing perspectives about this concept (Johnston, 1996; Raz, 1986; Taylor, 1995) and the role of schools in the formation of personal autonomy. Although the formation of personal identity, in this particular field, is usually connected with civic and political literacy, seen as key to the student formation, we argue that we should also consider other important aspects: the capacity to transform information into knowledge, self-knowledge, self-esteem, personal development into interaction with others, the capacity of moral judgement and the expression of feelings. Taking as our reference the bio-psycho-social model proposed by Welzar & Markowitsch (2005) we consider the autobiographical reasoning as a mnemonic system allowing conscious recall of past personal experiences, events and actions as well as their mental projection to our own subjective future (Tulving, 2002). Autobiographical Memory (AM) is significant to the self because it requires identity coherence and consistency through time. It is a narrative process. In this sense, AM is not an assemblage of personal memories, but rather a narrative construction about the vicissitudes of human intention organized in time (McAdams, 2003). Emotion have a key role in these narrative constructions (Bernal & Gonçalves, 2006). Considering this perspective we present a recollection of autobiographical reasoning's from students of Secondary Education, selected of a sample of the province of Seville. First, we conceptualize the autobiographical memory and describe his functions. Secondly, we penetrate into the formation of the competence for the personal autonomy. Thirdly, we explain the methodological process and the analysis of the results. Finally, as a conclusion of the analysis of the collected biographical stories, we describe the importance of the personal experiences for the construction of the personal autonomy.

Our aim is to analyse how and to what extent the socialization agents of formal (school) and non-formal (family, friends, etc) education contribute for the formation of personal autonomy as well as the relation between the personal maturity level and the formative and cultural practices experienced by the students. Here we followed the progressive model of identity status evolution proposed by Waterman (1982).

Method

We analyse the relevance of personal experiences for the formation of personal autonomy. We do so through the recollection of AM of a selected sample of students in secondary level from the province of Seville: 60 students, all 16 years old, 45% women and 55% men.

First, we used the EOMEIS - 2 (Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status) (Adams, Bennion, Huh, 1989)

Secondly, we have created and used an open questionnaire about autonomy and personal initiative.

For the analysis we took into account the identity status defined by the EOMEIS-2 and also gender variables. We used quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques.

Expected Outcomes

Conclusions concerning:

- Quantitative data:

1. According the collected data, for the students school is concerned with the construction of their own opinions and criterion;
2. Family, in the first place, and school, in the second place, have an important role in their preparation for life;
3. Education and reading are seen as key elements for their decision making processes and self-responsibility. In a second place appears internet and television.

- Qualitative data:

Here we underline the relation between the defined personal maturity levels (diffuse, accepted, exploratory, strong) and the formative cultural practices contributing for identity formation.

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