



Autonomy as both challenge and development in clinical education



A. Fredholm ^{a,*}, M. Savin-Baden ^b, L. Henningsohn ^c, C. Silén ^a

^a Department of Learning, Informatics, Management and Ethics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

^b Department of Health and Life Sciences, Coventry University, Coventry, United Kingdom

^c Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 March 2014

Received in revised form 21 August 2014

Accepted 28 August 2014

Available online 17 September 2014

Keywords:

Medical education

Autonomy

Self-directed learning

Authenticity

ABSTRACT

This study examines autonomy in learning, related to medical and health care students perception of learning and development in clinical education. An understanding of the ways in which students learning and professional development is facilitated by autonomy, and a qualitative different understanding of the concept is vital for future development of learning and teaching strategies in medical and health care education. Self-directed learning and management of the learning process have been, and still are, stressed within health care and medical education, thus paying less interest to internal processes of learning involving responsibility and independence. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between autonomy in learning and narratives of personal challenge and development in the context of student experiences in clinical education. The study was undertaken using narrative inquiry. Findings consist of four themes; Dependence of the clinical supervisor, Feelings of ambivalence, Professional becoming and Need for authenticity. Through our analysis of findings we suggest that autonomy should be regarded as something that develops in relation to others and not as a merely individual phenomenon and that an authentic clinical situation enhances students' experiences of autonomy.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This study examines autonomy in learning, related to medical and health care students' perception of learning and development in clinical education. An understanding of the ways in which students' learning and professional development is facilitated by autonomy, and a qualitative different understanding of the concept is vital for future development of learning and teaching strategies in medical and health care education.

Self-directed learning and autonomy in learning are connected to factors such as motivation, locus of control, ability to seek and apply knowledge, choice, and ability to identify learning needs and to evaluate learning outcomes (Regan, 2003; Lee, Mann, & Frank, 2010; White & Fantone, 2010; Levett-Jones, 2005; Williams, 2004; White, 2006; Zimmerman, 1990; Mifflin, 2004). There is a gap in the body of knowledge regarding the concept of autonomy in learning when it comes to how autonomy influences individual thinking, actions and awareness of learning. Many studies merely depict autonomy as a strategy, a way of managing your education in an autonomous way (Savin-Baden, 2000, 2003; Barnett, 1990, 2000).

The notion of self and management of the learning situation has been stressed, and is still stressed within health care and medical education, thus not much attention is paid to the internal processes of learning involving responsibility and independence (Silén & Uhlin, 2008). This is in contrast to the need within these professions for individuals who are responsible and make independent decisions. A limited view of the meaning of self-directed learning can be hindering for stimulation of student development of

* Corresponding author at: Department of Health Science, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden.
E-mail address: angelica.fredholm@kau.se (A. Fredholm).

independence. Therefore there is a need for a deeper understanding of other dimensions of what autonomy might mean for student learning and for health care professions. Eneau and Develotte (2012) show how autonomy in learning can be seen as a process reaching the goal that is autonomy of the learner and how this autonomy has social, meta-cognitive and emotional dimension.

2. Theoretical framework

Self-directed learning and self-regulated learning are both fundamental components of autonomy in learning with different emphasis depending on concept definition, the former with roots in adult education and the latter in cognitive psychology. Self-directed learning has often uncritically been interpreted as independence of classes, courses and faculty (Mifflin, 2004). Furthermore authors such as Savin-Baden (2000, 2003) and Barnett (1990, 2000) suggest that the current literature still focuses mainly on a more instrumental aspect of self-directed learning, often measured by the ability to seek and apply propositional knowledge. To develop self-directedness, students need feelings of being in charge and of having a genuine impact on the learning situation. Feelings of being in charge are connected to understanding the demands of the learning context, experiences of managing and getting feedback. Thus students need challenges, support and feedback in their struggle to become self-directed learners (Silén & Uhlin, 2008). To be able to develop capacities leading to self-direction, motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic, plays a key part (Williams, 2004). The term self-regulated learning is often used interchangeably with self-directed learning. However, the definitions of self-regulated learning emphasize issues more regarding control, ability to make choices and moral, emotional and intellectual independence (Regan, 2003; Lee et al., 2010; White & Fantone, 2010; Levett-Jones, 2005; Williams, 2004; White, 2006; Zimmerman, 1990; Mifflin, 2004).

The concepts of self-directed learning and autonomy in learning are often used interchangeably. In psychological terms through the self-determination theory, autonomy relates to motivation and can be understood as the inherited fundamental propensity of any living organism to be self-organized and psychologically self-ruled. This is shown as a basic need to experience self-governance and ownership of one's actions. Self-determination theory distinguishes between two forms of motivating conditions: controlled and autonomous (Chirkov, 2001). Controlled motivating conditions include external factors such as explicit or implicit rewards and punishments. Autonomous motivating conditions are driven by personal interest and perceived importance and meaning and include a sense of agency and choice (Albanese, 2010). Eneau (2008) suggested that there is a need to broaden the view of autonomy from simple questions of control, to questions about constructing personal identity, not only through the learning process, but also through the learner's interpersonal relationships. Eneau (2008) views autonomy as the prerequisite for development of individual identity, and identity (Eneau and Develotte, 2012, p. 16) as "the subject's inclusion in a structured relationship of interactions".

Following these ideas, autonomy must be viewed as something that takes place "through a reciprocity based on exchange and otherness" and "supposes that autonomy is born out of a realization of the interdependence of people who are summoned and bound to construct a social contract" (p. 246). This view raises new research questions in the field between autonomous learning and the autonomous learner. In a more practical sense, a different view on learner autonomy could shed light on how autonomy could be constructed through concrete learning situations (Eneau, 2008).

However, it would seem that what is essential for autonomy in learning, are perceptions of being competent, having intrinsic motivation as a driving force and a personal locus of control (Fazey & Fazey, 2001). Thus autonomous learners must be in control of their decision making, take responsibility for their own actions and have confidence in themselves. Littlewood (1996) stresses that at the core of autonomy in learning, is the learner's ability and willingness to make independent choices. Whereas, White (2006) is concerned with the importance of motivation and states that motivation, autonomy and control in learning all have powerful external influences in the form of educational setting, pedagogical structure and approaches, and means that these can create intrinsic motivation per se. Within these ways of viewing autonomy it seems that autonomy may be seen as both ends and means. Heron (2010) defines four levels of autonomy which can be used for understanding student development in clinical education. The first level is the learner being self-directed within teacher-prescribed learning activities, the second being students being invited with teachers to take part in program planning and assessment and the third level offers students to be self-directed in their own program planning and assessment. The fourth and last level of autonomy Heron defines as students' participation in decision making regarding who should make this or that decision within program planning and assessment.

According to Marton and Trigwell (2000), learning is about experiencing but a prerequisite of learning/experience is discernment. A necessary starting point for learning is discernment of an object. The learner has to discern the object in its environment to be able to "see" it and "experience" it in terms of a learning object. What we discern depends on our pre-understanding (Marton & Booth, 1997). Studies in a problem-based nursing context (Silén, 2000, 2004) have shown that a high degree of self-directed learning constantly creates situations where students have to discern meaning and relevance of different phenomena and learning objects. This discernment might produce a meta-cognitive awareness that could create qualitative different understanding of a field or profession. When students are forced to take responsibility learning not only is perceived as meaningful and developing, but can also without the proper support create feelings of uncertainty and abandonment.

Williams (2004) investigated self-directed learning in a problem-based education program and came to the conclusion that it enhances meta-cognitive skills. Marton (1979) defines meta-cognitive understanding or awareness as an aspect of understanding that reinforces the sense of meaning and coherence and allows students to think and reason about their own understanding. Therefore in this study autonomy is seen as an outcome of self-directed learning which contains abilities and traits such as motivation, control, ability to reflect and make independent choices, responsibility, learning strategies and feeling of being in control. Conditions for self-directed learning and self-regulated learning are provided by the educational system in the form of pedagogical structure, epistemology, curriculum construct, support and feed-back.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/364426>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/364426>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)