MEANINGS ATTACHED TO LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCE BY LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: A DISSECTION AND COMPARISON WITH THE EU DEFINITION

N. Bercu

Institute of Educational Sciences (ROMANIA)

Abstract

The paper deals with the analysis of Romanian students’ perceptions, conceptions and beliefs of learning to learn competence (LLC), as pointed out by several exploratory qualitative research, based on focus groups and questionnaires, that addressed specifically or generally this issue. The research aims were twofold. Firstly, it looked for identifying the students views on embedded aspects of the LLC and its evidence, utility, enablers and blockers in teaching and assessment practices in the classroom. Secondly, it compared the student's views on LLC against EU definition of learning to learn.

The research results shed light on what learning to learn competence means for students. Their perceptions of the LLC evidence and ends appeared in terms of what a person is, knows and does. They referred to the process of developing LLC in terms of features and procedures. For greater coherence, the data on learning, teaching and assessment behaviours that are seen as having an impact on LLC have been linked to those on its learning outcomes/evidence and organized into three broad categories. These are labelled as follows: a) student as an individual learner; b) student who is taught how to learn in the classroom; c) ideal student as an autonomous learner who has got LLC. These categories describe the passage from an individual student that learns to students that learn in the classroom under the teacher coordination to an ideal student, skilled at learning to learn.

The research carried out contributes to the body of knowledge in the field by bringing this necessary input from students about LLC definition that allows further comparison between students and policy makers definitions. Regarding the definition given by policy makers, there were used as a reference the descriptors of learning to learn competence as stated in the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong. A normative and an interpretative/empirical approach to defining LLC have been compared one to the other.

The research results have relevance for conceiving fitted intervention means for implementing LLC in lower secondary school in two significant ways: (a) firstly, by pointing out the commonalities and differences in the ways LLC is deemed by two very different educational stakeholders (policy makers and students), placed "at extremes" of the scale in terms of classroom context based thinking and control of policy decision-making; (b) secondly, by providing practical clues about designing a classroom environment that promotes, contributes, sustains and values students LLC. Student's responses provide insights into teachers' behaviours that might foster or block the development of students' LLC.

Keywords: Key competence - learning to learn, perceptions of learning to learn, lower secondary school students.