Abstract

The article's purpose is to develop a meaningful theory of freedom and relate it to educational policy and practice. First, the concept of freedom is analyzed; then some salient views of student freedom (progressivism, libertarianism, and essentialism) are evaluated; and finally, a resolution is undertaken of the problems raised by developing a position that relates freedom and authority more effectively than the previous positions reviewed.

Résumé

L'auteur veut développer une théorie significative de la liberté et en tirer une ligne de mire et de conduite applicable à l'enseignement. Après une analyse du concept de liberté, l'auteur évalue certaines opinions marquantes de la liberté étudiante (le progressisme, le "libertarisme" et l'essentialisme) pour en arriver à une résolution des problèmes soulevés par son étude où il développe une position qui établit un rapport plus effectif entre liberté et autorité que ne le font les positions précédentes qu'il a étudiées.

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STUDENT FREEDOM IN THE CLASSROOM

It is generally recognized that a certain amount of freedom is essential for students to learn effectively and to develop their abilities. American education gradually moved away from some of the restrictions on the learner's freedom in colonial Calvinistic schools, later struggled to decentralize bureaucratic schools that arose in the mid-nineteenth century, and alternated since the 1930s between progressivism and essentialism.

What is needed today is a way of conceptualizing student freedom in the classroom without succumbing to the weaknesses of either progressivism or essentialism. Thus the purpose of this article is to develop a meaningful theory of freedom and relate it to educational policy and practice. This will be accomplished by first exploring the concept of freedom; then presenting some salient views of student freedom and their weaknesses; and finally, offering a resolution of the problems raised by relating freedom and authority and indicating the implications for policy and practice.

The Concept of Freedom

Freedom has generally been expressed in two ways: "freedom from" and "freedom to." "Freedom from" is conceived as an absence of restraint or coercion so that any restrictions on the individual would be an abrogation of that person's freedom. The greater the area of non-interference the greater the individual's freedom. As Cranston noted, however, there are many different kinds of constraints and different kinds of freedom.[1] Circumstances are not hindering unless one wants to do something which those circumstances prevent.

"Freedom to" holds that one is not fully free to do something without the ability to perform an act; that is, to be free to do *X* not only means an absence of restraint but includes the ability, power, and means to do *X*. Thus an individual needs opportunity to choose among available

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alternatives, the ability to understand the character of the alternatives, and the ability to arrive at any informed choice.

Some writers, however, have claimed that there actually is only one form of freedom — "freedom from." Gribble contends that the distinction between the two types of freedom is artificial and that all cases of "freedom to" can be reduced to "freedom from." [2] He gives as an example that the student who is free to do homework is free of any kinds of constraints that might prevent the student from doing it. True, there may be many constraints: noisy atmosphere, no place to study, responsibility to take care of younger siblings while parents are away, and the like. Yet these and similar restraints may be absent, but if the student does not know how to solve math problems assigned or interpret poetry, the student lacks "freedom to" — namely, "freedom to" complete the assignments successfully and to continue to gain some level of mastery of those disciplines.

The author's view of freedom, a third position, will be presented more fully later in the article. It holds that freedom is not absolute, that it needs to be conceptualized in relation to authority, and that responsibility is a vital aspect of freedom. The goal for student freedom is seen as a movement from dependence to independence and increased autonomy while recognizing the interdependence of contemporary life.

Generally there is a presumption in favor of freedom so that interference with it cannot be arbitrary and capricious but is expected to be based on supportable grounds. Two justifications of freedom will be presented.

The first is an instrumental justification in the sense that the exercise of freedom helps to achieve certain desirable ends. It is thought that freedom is essential for the improvement of democratic societies because it permits the individual to choose and thereby cultivates his or her intellect and character. As John Stuart Mill noted: "The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice . . . . The mental and moral, like the muscular, powers are improved only by being used." [3]

Other studies provide a second justification by using a transcendental argument, an argument which attempts to show that without freedom a valued aspect of a way of life would not be possible.[4] Persons concerned with what they ought to do may inquire by engaging with others in practical discourse, where standards are built into the discourse for assessing claims. To engage in such discourse presupposes that one wants to exchange ideas and knowledge with others; therefore, it would be foolish to arbitrarily restrain others. Deliberation would be pointless if we had no freedom to act on our deliberations; and one cannot consistently engage in such rational discourse with others and deny them what is demanded for oneself. By engaging in such discourse it presupposes that one does not change people by force or restraint but by rational persuasion. Thus to deny freedom is to deny practical discourse and the freedom of speech to pursue what one ought to do.

Selected Views of Student Freedom

Early child-centered progressives leaned toward "freedom from" or an absence of restraint. This interpretation arose as a reaction against what progressives believed to be the philosophy of traditional education. This older education, progressives claimed, forced children to learn subject

matter isolated from the child's daily experience, exercised authoritarian control and employed stern discipline that failed to consider the vital needs and interests of the child.

Accepting Rousseau's dictum that the child is born basically good, the child would be freed from stringent rules and regulations and could be permitted to develop naturally, to explore and create. In turn, the teacher's role changed from disciplinarian and taskmaster to facilitator of learning activities. "The good teacher is now the one who puts friendliness in place of authority, who secures enthusiasm in place of obedience." [5] Thus children are not governed by fear of teacher disapproval but are "happily busy." Instead of military discipline and competition, cooperation was substituted where the students subordinated themselves for larger goals considered worthwhile. [6] Rugg and Shumaker proclaimed that in the activity school children will be free from rigid schedules, coercion, and lock-step methods; children will be active and engaged in self-expression; they will not study subjects but real life interactions. Children will no longer be passive or merely responsive to what is being taught, but will learn how to learn by themselves. The teacher no longer has to worry about discipline because the child becomes self-directed, self-disciplined. The activity or child-centered schools have eradicated the concept of discipline and implanted the concept of growth. [7]

At Summerhill, A.S. Neill used play, children's own interests, and their capacity to work and live with their peers in a cooperative arrangement by means of developing their own rules and regulations and seeing that they were enforced. In dealing with children who had failed to receive love and approval, it is important, he believes, to take their point of view and not try to channel them toward certain ends, which the child would only associate with disapproving adults. Neill tried several measures to combat childhood neurosis: sublimation, direct analysis to uncover the roots of the neurosis, and the development of an accepting permissive environment.

If a child threw mud on a door that Neill had just painted, Neill would swear at him; but if the child had done this act after just transferring from a hateful school, Neill would help the child sling mud so that the child could get back at the authority. Neill insisted that he observed a distinction in his policies between liberty and license: that license may be necessary for a cure, but ordinary children should respect others' rights. [8]

In the system of self-government that Neill established at Summerhill, he retained responsibility for overall administrative matters, diet and health, but turned the rest of the operations over to students, who met weekly to discuss rules and determine action to be taken against violators. Everyone was encouraged to express his/her views, and each student older than eight had one vote. Neill claimed that self-government is good civic education; it is therapeutic because it releases tensions; children are more likely to abide by rules that they, rather than adults, make; and since peers impose punishment, better relations are promoted between teachers and students because the teacher is no longer a disciplinarian. [9]

Although in the progressive model a serious attempt is made to meet the child's needs and interests, and discipline is more closely related to instruction and the social life of the school, some problems remain. It is commonly charged that the progressives were too permissive. What this criticism means in terms of our conception of freedom is that the progressives overemphasized "freedom from" prior to sufficient development of "freedom to." In other words, students were released from the restraints of traditional education to express themselves and develop naturally; yet many students had not developed the requisite abilities to perform the expected acts and to employ needed skills and judgment. Not only is it legitimate to curb "freedom from" when it

causes others harm, suffering, or interferes with their rights; this type of freedom could also be curtailed when the student exercising it may be harmed.

This brings us to the role of paternalism in education. A paternalistic act is one which "the protection or promotion of a subject's welfare is the primary reason for attempted or successful coercive interfere with an action or state of a person." [10] Such an act is done in the person's best interest whenever the person is incapable of performing the act for him or herself. Of the cases under consideration, two grounds would be applicable here: immaturity and lack of essential knowledge.

In terms of immaturity, perhaps some education authorities have been overly rigid in assuming the student must reach a certain chronological age before certain decisions can be made; they generally believe that a certain level of cognitive development must occur. A combination of cognitive, social, and experiential measures needs to be applied and each student should be looked at individually before a particular paternalistic practice is undertaken. And in situations where the evidence is not compelling, the student should be given the freedom to act independently of education authorities so long as serious injury or harm is not likely to result.

The progressives also overestimate the child's ability to use a discovery approach in gaining basic knowledge. The use of an experience curriculum where the child must initiate learning and gain knowledge first-hand may be a welcome change from lectures and expository presentations but, when used exclusively, it could be fallacious and dangerous. It assumes that the immature child should learn from scratch what it has taken civilization thousands of years to discover, develop, and refine. Since there are not enough lifetimes for any student to discover knowledge experientially, it is necessary to combine experiential learning with expository learning.

Let us assume that the young child is left to discover a moral code through experience. How would this be done? Without being shown by adults, the child would not know what is meant by rules; and without being able to understand the meaning and use of rules, the child could not develop a morality and eventually become an independent moral agent.

Related to the progressive ideas about freedom but carrying these ideas further than the progressives is the philosophy of libertarianism. Libertarianism is a political philosophy, a small but growing political movement in the United States, and an educational philosophy with distinctive programmatic ideas. Its roots lie in anarchism, a political movement and philosophy that emerged in France during the nineteenth century. Anarchism opposes the coercive power of the modern state and seeks maximum possible freedom compatible with social life. "Libertarianism," however, was not promoted as a synonym for anarchism until the 1890s.

Libertarians generally exhibit suspicion and distrust toward the government's role in education. Many libertarians are acutely dissatisfied with public education and object to the coercive power of government and believe it has usurped parents' rights. They consider the state's role to be detrimental to private education and offer legislation and plans for reducing what they consider to be government interference and for granting parents primary authority in the formal education of the children. This education might be conducted exclusively in the home or in public, private, or parochial schools; the main point is: parents (or guardians) would choose the education best for their children.

Such libertarians as John Holt [11] and Richard Farson [12] generally believe that children should be granted the same rights as adults. Thus children would have the right to do what adults legally do.

But, says Holt, what we have done instead is to create an army of people to tell the young what they have to learn and to make them learn it. Compulsory education, he asserts, "is such a gross violation of civil liberties that few adults would stand for it. But the child who resists is treated as a criminal." [13] Farson, too, opposes compulsory school attendance and claims that schools function not to educate but to maintain the system through indoctrination and other techniques. [14] Thus Farson would abolish compulsory schooling and with it indoctrination, while Holt would allow young people "to decide if, when, how much, and by whom, they want to be *taught* and the right to decide what they want to learn in a school and if so which one and for how much of the time." [15]

It may well be that in their enthusiasm to emancipate children Holt and Farson may sacrifice the welfare of children for their presumed rights because they overlook the developmental differences between children and adults. Adult constraint, says Diana Baumrind, is a precondition for self-determination. [16] No child psychologist would contend that the child is equal to the adult in experience, intelligence, and moral competence. And not even the child liberators can deny the immense differences in knowledge, experience, and power separating the child from the adolescent, the adolescent from the adult. These differences, she adds, do not stem from adult exploitation but from laws of nature that are not revokable. Thus the child liberators ignore the fact that children are inferior to adults in their ability to survive,and that self-determination is a product of growth and maturation which is fostered by adult authority exercised in early years.

Thus paternalism may be warranted because of the immaturity of children and youth as well as their inability to judge soundly what is in their best interest and to protect themselves from needless harm and suffering. In conclusion, when some forms of paternalism lead to necessary states of well-being, then an interference with "freedom from" is acceptable. By so interfering the probability is that "freedom to" will subsequently be expanded.

Does that then mean that essentialism provides the answer sought to student freedom in the classroom? To explain why essentialism does not provide a defensible solution, a brief examination and assessment is needed.

Essentialism provided progressivism with its chief opposition. Although expressed in various forms in early American education, it became an organized movement in the 1930s, dominated education during the Cold War era of the 1950s, and enjoyed a resurgence in the late 1970s and 1980s in the back to basics movement.

Essentialism has long been concerned with discipline, order, control, and industriousness. Demiashkevich defines discipline as an ensemble of rules and regulations governing student behavior. He claims that it is important that students be made to see the significance of school rules and regulations so they will accept them. Punishment is not in itself objectionable; therefore, when exhortations have been applied but prove useless, the teacher may resort to punishment. [17]

Harris notes four cardinal duties in the schoolroom: regularity, punctuality, silence, and industry. These duties extend beyond the school to the development of good character in everyday life. The pupil should become conscious of responsibility in the act of obedience to a higher will. [18]

Other essentialists talk about the importance of social control. Finney claims that too much emphasis has been placed on individual initiative and independence as a result of misconceptions about democracy. [19] He sees nothing wrong with drill and memorization; in fact, there may be occasions where regimentation is needed. Resistance from the young should be expected because

of the conflict between youthful instincts and social demands; yet social stability requires that resistance be overcome. Being indulgent with children is not in their interest, for the alternative to control is not freedom but social chaos.

It should be noted that more recent essentialists tend to agree with the earlier essentialist views expressed above and have not advanced a new position on student freedom. [20] Back-to-basics is a movement that began in the early 1970s and has grown rapidly in the United States and Canada. Fundamental schools (the title given to schools that emphasize the basics) were initiated by parents and local citizens who were alarmed over declining scores on standardized achievement tests, inadequate grasp of the basics or fundamentals, and an overly permissive atmosphere in public schools. Since the movement focuses on the 3 Rs and firm disciplinary standards, it is actually a truncated essentialist program because it fails to give equal weight to the other elements in the cultural heritage; however, it is generally consonant with essentialist principles but underdeveloped, except that back-to-basics proponents advocate corporal punishment while some prominent essentialists would not do so. Fundamental schools stress the basics, strict discipline, competition, letter grades, standardized testing, ability grouping, homework, and dress codes. Such schools also place emphasis on moral standards, courtesy, respect for adults, and patriotism. Other characteristics include teaching logical reasoning, one's history, heritage, and government structure.

Essentialism provides structure, order, and regulated study habits; it avoids the danger of focusing exclusively on the child's interests by making the teacher the locus of authority and center of classroom attention. The danger is that the teacher's role may degenerate into authoritarianism. The student's "freedom from" is sorely restricted — even more so in fundamental schools than with earlier essentialist classrooms — and "freedom to" is restricted by a required curriculum and a host of school and classroom rules and regulations that students usually do not participate in developing. The penchant for corporal punishment in fundamental schools may, in those cases where psychological harm is inflicted, restrict the student's "freedom to" insofar as the trauma inhibits the ability to perform certain acts. [21]

The emphasis in essentialism and in back to basics lies less in the child's interests than in the maintenance of order and the teacher's authority. The relation between teacher and student is unilateral, with the teacher giving instructions and the student following orders. The opportunity for the young eventually to become reflective thinkers and more autonomous persons becomes seriously threatened if the model is imposed too literally. Although a certain amount of order is necessary in any educational program (though the amount and type of order will differ depending upon the nature of the program, its objectives, and the students involved), order should be a means to an end (desired educational outcomes) and not an end in itself (a position that essentialists seem to hold). Bureaucracies, prisons, and detention centers may be orderly without much learning taking place. Teachers should be concerned about developing a sound learning environment for students in which the full professional abilities of teachers can be utilized. It is not "order" in the abstract but, instead, functional forms of order that may be needed in some situations but inadvisable in others.

An Alternative Approach

Progressivism risks advocating freedom with insufficient attention to responsibility, and essentialism risks denying freedom. At any age level there is an optimum range of adult control where too much may lead to submissiveness or later to rebelliousness and too little may result in

immaturity and irresponsibility. [22] Certain types of child rearing conditions seem to support the development of greater self-determination. Supportive conditions are parental warmth and concern, and consideration and consistency in rule enforcement. [23] Autocratic or very lenient parents usually have children who are low in self-confidence and either dependent or rebellious. [24] Thus the growth of independence and self-reliance are more likely to occur in homes with democratic controls where rules are consistent and adequately enforced.

Proponents of both laissez-faire freedom and autocratic authority are therefore misguided. The child is nurtured within a framework of authority, and it is within the functions of this framework that the child eventually grows from dependence to independence, from heteronomy to autonomy. Authority presupposes a normative order in which one can appeal not only in cases of dispute over rules and laws but one where social life takes place and models for codes of conduct are approved.

The mistake has been to pose freedom against authority. Freedom, however, is always found within a social context: a society which is regulated by a normative system of rules and principles (rules as simple as traffic rules to principles of honesty and the protection of human life). The question is whether authority is democratically established and responsive to the will of the people by being open to scrutiny and criticism and providing free elections to express the larger will.

Freedom is not absolute; it can be overridden by its dangers to the public interest, by violation of some other principle that has priority, or the failure to act responsibly toward others to whom one is obligated. For instance, it is not in the public interest for persons to drive without a license or engage in drunken driving, even though by enforcing such rules "freedom from" is restricted. Freedom may conflict with such other principles as equality, as in the case where parents are required against their will to have their children bussed across town to comply with a court-ordered desegregation plan. As for obligations, a person has no right to deny others the freedom to which they are entitled (e.g., denying others free speech because the ideas are disagreeable). In some relationships one has the further obligation to protect another's freedom: parent-offspring, teacher-student, doctor-patient, and lawyer-client relations.

Thus one aspect of freedom is responsibility. To act responsibly may mean to comply with duties, but in many cases it also involves more than this. The moral features of responsibility can better be discerned when responsibility is considered to be a form of responding to others and caring about them. We are responsible only when we are able to respond to others positively rather than opposing, harming, or shirking our obligations. As Dewey noted: "One is held responsible in order that he may *become* responsible, that is, responsive to the needs and claims of others, to the obligations implicit in his position." [25] One shows care and concern for others by treating them as persons upon whom one's acts have an effect or on whom others depend for the performance of one's duties.

The goal for student freedom in education is to move from dependence to independence and increasing autonomy while recognizing that interdependence is a necessary aspect of contemporary social life. Each individual who strives for independence will not likely become independent without developing certain basic skills and competencies that are created within the framework of various authority patterns. The process of becoming independent also increasingly involves becoming one's own authority and, as a young adult's new responsibilities should call for it (as when one becomes a parent or a teacher), to play the appropriate authority-type role to the young of the next generation.

But in order to increase "freedom to" (greater independence and autonomy), it is necessary to enhance "freedom from" by reducing and, if possible, eliminating conditioning and indoctrination. Both processes bypass reflective thinking: the former process stamps in unreflective behaviour patterns and the latter inculcates unexamined dogmas. And if the student is to move from dependence to independence, it will be necessary to learn reflective thinking and arrive at one's own judgments and decisions.

Autonomy has been variously expressed; but one of the more common interpretations holds that "a person is autonomous to the degree that he shows initiative in making independent judgments related both to thought and to action. [26] Of course this type of cognitive autonomy is not evident in the neophyte or the apprentice; it requires sufficient intellectual and personal growth not only to make one's own judgments but to determine what constitutes adequate evidence and supportable grounds for truth claims.

Yet cognitive autonomy by itself is not a desirable goal because intelligent hired killers and clever professional criminals could be cognitively autonomous. Such autonomy needs to be coupled with morality and consideration for others; it needs to be combined with responsibility as a form of responding to others and caring about them. It also requires being responsible for oneself: to take a caring attitude toward oneself and to strive to develop one's full abilities. Only by using one's freedom to be responsible for oneself can one also take a caring attitude toward others.

It may be thought that the weaknesses of cognitive autonomy could be rectified by combining cognitive and emotional autonomy. But if by emotional autonomy is meant not only emotional independence and self-sufficiency, but a kind of emotional detachment from others and things, it would need to be connected closely with the development of moral autonomy in order to prevent emotional detachment from degenerating into insensitivity and unconcern for others. Thus all forms of autonomy cannot stand alone but should be combined with responsibility and caring in the use of one's freedom.

A few words about policy. Those policies should be developed that allow the maximum freedom consistent with others' freedom. Policy should also be used to support achievement of the school's goals. School policy should be participatory and should involve teachers and students as much as possible.

Policies and rules should not violate student rights. Students are more likely to assent to and comply with rules which they have had a hand in developing; consequently, they should participate in formulating classroom rules whenever their understanding and responsibility are sufficient and their participation will enchance rather than detract from promoting a sound learning environment. The student council or some other governing body should work cooperatively with the principal and other officials in improving school policy, and each district should elect a students' representative to serve on the local school board as a nonvoting member. The representative will present and interpret the students' positions, explain group viewpoints within the student body, and urge or discourage the passage of certain legislations. Thus students can learn to exercise their freedom within a context of authority to foster their full development and to learn to live fruitfully with others in democratic communities.

NOTES

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[7] Rugg, Harold & Shumaker, Ann. (1928). *The child-centered school.* New York: World, 102, 314.

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[12] Farson, Richard. (1974). *Birthrights.* New York: Macmillan, 5.

[13] Holt, John. (1974). *Escape*, 241-42.

[14] Farson, Richard. (1974).*Birthrights.*, Ch.7.

[15] Holt. (1974). *Escape.*, 240.

[16] Baumrind, Diana. (1978, Spring). Reciprocal rights and responsibilities in partent-child relations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 34, 182-84.

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[20] See: Smith, Mortimer. (1949). *And madly teach.*Chicago: Henry Ragnery; Bell, B.I. (1949). *Crisis in education. New York:* Whittlesey House; and Rickover, H.G. (1963). *American education — A national failure.* New York: E.P. Dutton.

[21] For amplication of these ideas, see: Hyman, I.A. & Wise, J.H. (Eds.). (1974). *Corporal punishment in American education.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[22] Bronfenbrenner, Urie. (1961) The changing American child: A speculative analysis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 17(1), 6-18.

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