

# Is the Principal Goal of Education to Promote Autonomy?

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**Abstract:** The use of autonomy is by now well-documented, implicitly being regarded as a benign capacity and a good thing (Dearden, 1972; Crittenden, 1979; Robson, 1991). However, what educational evaluation can be made for it? It seems sensible that autonomy could be firmly legitimized as an educational aim when we are convinced for its actual worth and for what it makes possible. So this paper explores some potential justifications that autonomy can make for the education goal. It begins with the contribution of autonomy can make to the externally imposed authority confronted by children by transforming Isaian Berlin's (1958) definition of autonomy. The paper then turns to extend Dearden's (1972) account of autonomy to the subjects' own internally sovereign authority. The first two sections will deeply explore what is autonomy and its worth. In the third section, it proceeds to present its value regarding what autonomy could introduce in the shape of children's rights, and furthermore why it is valuable to be an educational goal.

**Keywords:** Autonomy; Rights and education; Paternalism; Egoism

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## 1. Autonomy and externals: paternalism

Education could be concerned with promoting the autonomy of the children as respecting for the individuality is the starting point of personality development and education needs to reflect on it (Suransky, 1992). When it comes to the communally competing values held by society, it is possible that the aim of education would slightly slip to a moral dimension. In this way, autonomy means an alternative to externally imposed authorities and rules. The external doctrine fails to teach an individual how to deal with, but it is children themselves that ought to deliberate what he is doing and why he is doing it to resolve the conflict situations (Bailey, 1984). However, the high degree of using individual liberty could reinforce selfishness (Marx, 1844), so I question the usefulness of autonomy in personal level: to what extent a man should be entitled to conduct his life?

## 2. Autonomy and internals: egoism

Autonomy could be defined as a process of deep deliberations. It enables people to develop reflective ability. Although some writers may define autonomy like this (Dearden, 1972; Frankfurt, 1987; Hand, 2006), I would further confirm it in different perspective. Back to the first section, when facing with conflicts, relying on external authorities cannot reach a solution. White (1982) objected this view, but admittedly, it is autonomy that motivates people to know what and why he is doing (Bailey, 1984) to solve the conflicts. Within the educational settings, using autonomy allows children to be able to judge for themselves whether the rules of adults are 'right' (Robson, 1991). It is important to encourage children not to simply conform to the moral control of adults around them. This could be viewed as a response to Dunlop's (1984) assumption that education should aim to raise questions into children's minds and also suggest ways by which they may come to answer them. For this, it proves the aim of education could be associated with promoting autonomy of children again. Furthermore, Reiss and White (2014: 79) attach it to 'whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences', the worth of autonomy more lies in helping us find out what is more worthwhile.

## 3. Autonomy and rights-in-trust

What does give us reason to take advantage of autonomy is 'our belief that its exercise has a certain worth and value' (Levinson, 1999: 36). In other words, to exercise autonomy needs to couple with its actual advantages, which reinforces its foundation in educating

children, and then it could be a necessary part of education. So this section discusses whether autonomy deserves to be accounted as the business of education to promote it by following its connection with children.

It is incumbent on education to believe autonomy-promoting as its principal goal. For the sake of future selves, autonomy enables children to envisage their own choices and to confer informative options and possibilities, which could be established by rights-in-trusts. It is beneficial for their natural growth through self-governance and self-determination. The more trust to him, the more options and innate interests would yield. It is suggesting that autonomy can allude to future, which leads to my next consideration of what autonomy could generate for the child's future.

#### **4. Autonomy and the child's future**

Autonomy could be summed up as children's privilege over openness to their future, accordingly, I argue that the attachment of this two elements works in invoking children's cognitive learning on themselves. By implicitly or explicitly presupposing the first-order to form second-order preference (Dearden, 1972), it is probable that children are capable of formulating critical thinking and thoughtfulness minds, which facilitates them to invariably rethink and draw a sketch of their innermost being. Having been exposed to robust activities and experiences in both formal and informal learning, children are constantly inquiring and planning what to think and do (Meadows and Cashdan, 1988), and keeping reminding themselves of why you chose this but not that to get to where you will be eventually. This allows them to output a rational autonomy, 'the ability to reason effectively' across a wide range of thought deriving from them (Standish, 1999: 37). As a result of that, they are more likely to have sufficient confidence in the rightness of their choices due to a deliberate decision, simultaneously shaping an inner self-acceptance as individuals (Meadows and Cashdan, 1988). Especially in school pervaded with plural viewpoints and perspectives, it is a vantage point to lay children themselves open to challenge (Levinson, 1999), thus making a moral judgment and assessment of their own beliefs. In this way, their views could be altered and shared. Children would be more aware of the selves they are meant to be.

In a nutshell, autonomy not only takes precedence over thinking about children's deep thinking, but also leading children to a clear image of self-position. It is necessary to set autonomy as the principal goal of education. This argument is predicated on the belief that these long-term future values and goodness should be fostered in childhood through his own self-governing and modeling. To this end, I believe autonomy could leave a broaden space for a promising prospect before the children become fully developed and matured.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In this essay, I utilized paternalism and egoism to interpret what autonomy is on the basis of others' thoughts. I summarize it as a process of deep thinking. When suffering the external conflicts, it is not proper to subscribe ourselves to authority. Understood in this way, autonomy liberates people to do things that they think are standards of their conduct. This makes people realize simply following authority cannot reach a conclusion. Instead, they need to search their minds to think about the meaning of doing. Conversely, if a person tries to too focus on his own will by using the principle only valid for himself, it introduces selfishness culture and egoism is the case. It could be described as an extreme form of autonomy, but it would be resolved by interacting with community. However, this goes back to the intervention of paternalism. As a result, there appear to have three grounds: paternalism, autonomy, and egoism. The middle stage, autonomy, enables people to deal with the external and the internal world critically and to balance this two. The process leads people to think deeply about their thinking. Transforming this perspective in educational field, it facilitates children's critical thinking and analysis of self-knowledge, which is beneficial to project their prospect. As the certain content of children's future is embedded in autonomy, the rights-in-trust should be endorsed. Even for an unformed child, his free to choose cannot be withdraw. Preserving his free choice now means respecting for children's future autonomy, which is an effective way to make growth unforced. It is the adult that he comes to be will master the choice. In that way, such beliefs of children's prospect appear to owe much to a tradition of autonomy. It is a causally important condition for the achievement of self-fulfillment.

To summarize, the principal goal of education should be to promote autonomy. Either for onward or inward world, it plays a significant role in children's feeling and thinking. Regardless of paternalism or egoism ground, the justification appeals to the value of autonomy. Therefore, it could be argued that the business of education need to promote it. Children have the right of programming the course of their life, hence justifying the right of possessing and exercising autonomy in advance. The deep thinking aroused by autonomy leaves their prospect open for themselves. Any child deprived of autonomy, is somehow deprived of the opportunities to realize their own good and decide the directions of their own growth.

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