

To what extent is the family or the school responsible for primary education?

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Abstract: Who should be responsible for the education of primary school pupils? The answer seems to be clear: the family and school, as the main participants in the process of primary education, are reasonable to be responsible for pupils. However, this leaves us with some worthy questions to be considered: who should be most responsible for a child's education within a family? what different types of responsibility should be taken by family and school with regards to primary education? which actor is more responsible for primary education? Based on those questions, this paper seeks to investigate the different educational responsibilities of family and school, and will answer the question of balance between these two actors in primary education.

Key words: family education, school education, responsibility, balance

The responsibility of family education

The family can be regarded as the first, and possibly the most significant, school for children and it plays a crucial role in the early stage of a child's education.

Investigating the responsibility of family education in more depth, Bereiter (1974) presents that education, in a family, involves both training and childcare. This could be interpreted to mean raising children and helping them to develop particular skills or habits in the light of some principles. Swapon (2011) goes further and outlines four different roles that should be played by parents in family education: "cheerleader, friend, teacher and enforcer." These four roles of parents may demonstrate that parents need to be more responsible for children's mental education. Oktaviani (2017) further addresses that "family's main task for the children's education is the foundation of moral education and view of life." Based on those opinions, a family should at least undertake three tasks of education covering skill-training, child care and mental or moral education. Among these tasks, childcare, and mental and moral education should be stressed, because skill-training and acquirement of knowledge are relatively limited in family education compared with school education. What family can do is to provide a situation which is as stable and as safe as possible for children to grow up, and develop their wholesome personality. As for the responsibility of skill-training, in my opinion, parents in a family can take responsibility of training children some basic life skills and habits, or teaching some basic knowledge of the life, even passing some special family traditional skills, like fixing the clock, but acquirement of other relatively complex and professional knowledge and skills may rely on the help of school education.

The responsibility of school education

School education occupies an important position in the process of educating children, we should consider what aspects of education should be taken by schools. Different people have various views, and these are discussed below.

Training and childcare?

Bereiter (1974) considers education to cover training and childcare. Nevertheless, when he mentions school education, he suggests separating these two functions from each other. Schools can do these, without meaning that they must take sole responsibility for either of them. In my opinion, school education could "unpack" (Bereiter, 1974) these two responsibilities and allocate them to other agents, like family and society. This would mean that the ways of taking responsibility are changed but not that the owner of responsibility is replaced.

Furthermore, Beriter's (1974) idea of separation suggestion is conceptually useful but would be difficult to implement, because it requires a large workforce and plenty of support from society, and would be especially hard to put into practice in socio-economically deprived regions. In such areas, few other social resources can be utilised so that schools can delegate their responsibility to other social agents. Schools have to be responsible for both training and childcare. Thus, Beriter's (1974) assumptions may ignore the reality of some regions, although it is meaningful to clarify school education responsibility.

Moral education?

Another point that deserves attention from Bereiter (1974) is his opposition to school education attempting to meet social needs such as solving social problems. He explains that school education is not as effective in providing stimulation to solve social problems. As solving those problem is long-term work, the effects of school education on the changing of people's behaviour may be less impactful than by using incentives. Opposition of applying school education to solve social problems, in this case, is likely a way of opposing the notion that school

education should take responsibility for moral education.

I shall here disagree with this point. According to Wringe (2006), moral understanding and genuinely moral judgements further lead to the moral development of the young, and schools could be the medium through which moral understanding and judgements are explained through different methods of moral education in primary schools, a basic view of morality can be fostered in children so that they can at least know what is right and wrong from a young age. When children grow up in a positive moral situation, they may generally form a good sense of morality and regulate their behaviour automatically so that some morality-related society problems will be decreased. When schools are involved to help solve those social problems, it means schools are taking responsibility of moral education. As such, school education, especially primary school education, does in fact have the responsibility of primary moral education to children.

Transmitting Powerful knowledge?

Young (2016) indicates that school is primarily an agency of cultural or knowledge transmission, and that transmitting powerful knowledge (specialist knowledge) is a schools' responsibility. I strongly agree with Young's opinion that it is an important responsibility for school education to pass culture and knowledge to next generation, but with regards to the issue of what kind of knowledge should be transmitted by school education, I hold different views. The kind of knowledge transmission should vary according to different stages of education. What I believe is that during early stage of education the school should focus on training pupils, cultivating and developing a basic understanding of the world in them. It would be better for teachers to help them adjust to the school situation by teaching them how to learn. Children may not be able to acquire too much "specialist" knowledge at a young age.

On the other hand, in terms of the responsibility of transmission knowledge, I prefer the concept of an "aims-based curriculum" (Reiss and White, 2014). They mention that school education should develop in every student a "background understanding – the understanding of human nature, of our social life and how it has developed as it is, and of the natural world in which we live." (Reiss and White, 2014). "Background knowledge" in their discussion means general rather than specialist knowledge. I argue that primary school education should focus on taking the responsibility of transmitting background knowledge. Primary education should be a process of training students and at the same time introducing a world that differs from the pupil's family and laying the foundation for further education.

The relationship between family education and school education

Competing and Cooperating?

With regards to the relationship between family education and school education, Beriter (1974) once indicated that teachers play a role which "does not merely supplement the role of the parents but competes with it and even usurps it." He raises this point because when a teacher asks parents to encourage their child to try harder on schoolwork, they are actually using the parents as an instrument to achieve their own educational goals.

I hold different view about what Beriter (1974) said. Although school education can influence the process of family education, it does not mean that school education competes with family education. When teachers send notes to parents and require assistance, it is not competitive with family education, nor does it interfere with parents' right of education.

On the one hand, it is acknowledged that improving students' performance is the responsibility of school education, but the growth of students can not only rely on a single factor (school). According to my previous experience in a primary school, most parents of pupils can realize that they should take responsibility for child education but they did not know how to take this responsibility. Some of them were not even aware of what their children wanted. In these cases, the school can provide them with direction in considering how to educate their children. During the process of observing the growth of their children at schools, they may form their own image of education. This time school education is not competitive with family education, but instead is guiding it. Moreover, according to Guerra and Luciano (2010), "setting up good relationships between educational services and families meets a need regarding both contexts that deal primarily with children's education". What this means is that when it comes to education, the key is building and maintaining good relationships between family and school. They also indicate that a "good" relationship with families is not a simple collaboration but a proposal to share educational resources and responsibility freely (Guerra and Luciano, 2010). Hence, I think it would be better to describe the relationship between family education and school education as alliances in a project, with the common aim of providing better education to children, rather than competitors in a contest.

What should the balance be between family education and school education?

As discussed above, both the family and the school have the responsibility to educate children in the stage of primary education, but what should the balance be between them? How should we weight these responsibilities? Some people argue that education should respect human rights, but that school education does not respect the freedom of parents to choose what education they want to some extent. Although there may be mistakes in the process of choosing education, parents and children should have such right without restriction. "It must be

recognized that the right of people to make mistakes in educating themselves and their children is one that cannot legitimately be withheld” (Beriter 1974). Buckman and Illich (1973) had even previously presented the possibility of “education without schools”. According to this viewpoint, if parents have absolute freedom and right to educate their children, it can be inferred that most responsibility of education belongs to the family.

There is another voice arguing that more responsibility for education should belong to the school. According to Guerra and Luciano (2010), families nowadays think that educational services are essential reference places for their children’s education though parents want to be considered in their parental role. That shows that in the balance of educational responsibility, parents prefer to receive the help from school education.

In terms of two different sides on the debate of balance between family education and school education, I believe that the ideal balance should be half-and-half. Both schools and families occupy a similarly indispensable position in the education of children. The reasons for this are explained as below.

Reviewing the above discussion about the balance between family education and school education, if we assume that the main force that should take educational responsibility is family, then this may require a relatively advanced family context. Whether it is accepted or not, class, economic conditions, and parents’ literacy level all factor into the quality of family education. If a family chooses to educate a child freely and expects a satisfying outcome, a lack of material conditions or mental conditions will not be helpful to achieve this goal. As such, not all family can meet the requirements completely at the same time. However, school can cover these requirements at the same time through the aggregation of educational resources, and this could be an important reason to support school education. Furthermore, school education can provide a context that is similar to a society, where children have a chance to leave their comfort zone and interact with this wider context. In the practice of interaction with people, they can know more about the world that they live in. It is difficult for the family alone to provide this context. Based on all these factors, the school should not be seen as less important than the family in children’s education.

Nevertheless, it is also not reasonable for parents to rely on school education too much. When I was working as a teacher, I found that there were many parents who thought that the all responsibility of education should be taken by the school. Most of those parents think when they sent their children to school, they can enjoy the ‘service’ of school without worry. Rather than the notion that “parents also want to be listened in their parental role” (Guerra and Luciano, 2010), the reality is that it seems like those parents forget their parental role and do not want to be listened to. School and school teachers are even regarded as servers to educate their children and free them from the ‘bond’ of education. If they find any problem in the outcomes of education, that is seen as the problem of school’s service. As a teacher, I feel disappointed and helpless when confront with this situation. In my view, those parents lack a respect for school education, and also weaken their own educational responsibility for their children. Although parents send their children to school, the responsibility of family education does not disappear or is not taken over by school education. They coexist in the whole. They share as much responsibility for education as school education.

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