Liberating Education: What From, What For?

Editors:

Igor Cvejić,
Predrag Krstić,
Nataša Lacković,
Olga Nikolić

Univerzitet u Beogradu
Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju

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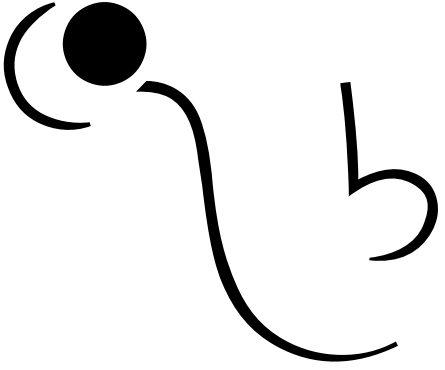

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Igor Cvejić[1]

The Emotional Base of Educational Process: Beyond Care for Wellbeing

This paper starts from the presupposition that the necessity of the education of "immatures" does not rest primarily on biological or empirical reasons, but on normative ones. As argued by Tamar Schapiro (Schapiro 1999), on a recognition of moral autonomy and responsibility. This immediately opens the problem which Schapiro (Ibid.) calls a "problem of childhood". On the one hand, autonomy is not something that (passively) happens. On the other hand, autonomy does not arise only from a set of choices and actions of immatures. Thus, the main aim of education could be overcoming the addressed problem.

In the second part of the article, I will address Schapiro's solution, as well as criticisms of that solution. However, the central goal of this paper will be to designate essential emotional relations between the educator and the learner. First, we must consider that an educator must be capable of showing care for a learner perceived as

1 Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade: cvejic@instifdt.bg.ac.rs.

an autonomous agent, beyond (usually patronizing) care for wellbeing, even if this care is no more than therapeutic trust. To be more precise, an educator needs to have emotional capacities to care for that which the learner cares for, i.e. that which Bennet W. Helm calls care about an agent as such. In other words, emotional processes must include a recognition of learners' emotions. This is still not enough, because this one-sided (weak) asymmetric relation cannot explain how the educator's authority could influence learner's autonomy. In order for this to happen, educational process must involve a mutual engagement between the educator and the learner, so learners can adopt the influence of the educator's evaluations on the basis of their own autonomous evaluative perspective, without undermining their own autonomy. This is the relation we paradigmatically find in friendship. Thus, educational processes seem to have to involve (quasi-)friendship without equality. I will argue for an alternative view – to understand educational processes as joint engagements, involving mutual care between its actors, who treat each other as "one of us".

Emotions and Normative Reasons for Education and Emancipation

The role of emotions in education could be studied for various reasons. One of them is certainly related to a motivational role emotion plays in the learning process. Positive emotions can encourage students to engage in a learning activity. However, negative emotions can also stimulate intensive positive attitude toward learning (e.g., shame for failing an exam etc.). Apart from these psychological and motivational effects, emotions can also have an impact on social cohesion, either between a teacher and his/her students or between students. Moreover, it is widely recognized that emotion influences cognitive capacities, for example, by stimulating attention and memory. What applies to students also applies to teachers. Careful research of the impact emotions have in education could help us to develop various strategies and plans and generally lead to what might be called an emotional economy in education.

For similar reasons we study the role particular emotions have in education, e.g. guilt, shame, pride, joy, fear etc. The focus here is not on general motivational or cognitive impact, but on various positive and negative impacts of a specific emotion. However, the main end of it is the development of emotional economy.

None of this will be a topic in this article. I am starting from three presuppositions that immediately explain in what way emotions are important for education. (1) The first is one of the presuppositions of relational education, that stipulate that education is above all about the relation between its actors. (2) The second presupposition is that every interpersonal relation could be explained in terms of emotions which are involved. The idea that emotions "color" interpersonal relation is not new, but this does not mean that every interpersonal relation is based on intensive emotions between the parties (like love, for example). The point is, rather, that even a relation deprived of emotions could be explained in emotional terms – as colored with indifference. The question would be: *how is the relation between actors in education emotionally colored?* This question does not require us saying anything prescriptive about these relations. (3) However, I also think that the bases of emotional relations in educational processes are normative. This means that there is a kind of commitment by those who are (intentionally) involved in educational processes, to how this relation *ought to be*. What follows from the third presupposition is that reasons for teacher/student relation cannot be articulated in merely descriptive terms but a normative one (roughly speaking, it is about rights and responsibilities). The least complicated way to address the necessity of education in the relation between adults and infants is to point out its biological reasons. We are all born without skills and knowledge required for our own preservations and we must acquire them from those who already have them – this could be a catchline of this approach indicated already in the myth of Prometheus who provided us with the understanding of fire (see Plato 1996). Even if this approach cannot explain the necessity of education (as we know it), the argu-

ment can be strengthened with the claim that we live in extraordinary complex societies and that different knowledge should be acquired to cope with the challenges of living in such societies (see Dewey 2001). In the end, it seems that this is the reason why we pack out our children to school. Of course, education does not only serve the preservation of life. Education is also about the development of skills and knowledge which could provide us some extra benefit. This benefit is very often manifested in the agreement about mutual use of other party's resources (a student pays a teacher to provide them with skills and knowledge).

All of this can only explain education in terms of the development of skills and techniques and most probably in terms of supporting infants' growing desires. However, the merely descriptive explanation cannot disclose why parents may require their children to eat vegetables even if they protest, or why a mentor may insist that a student's thesis should be changed even if the student is not satisfied with the offered solution. The question is *why do we treat someone differently and hold them responsible in a different way than we hold ourselves and others equal to us; not taking their actions seriously in the same way and as if we have a kind of paternalistic obligation toward them?* Reasons for this, as argued by Tamar Schapiro, could only ever be normative (Schapiro 1999). This means that one who has to learn is treated as someone who is lacking the kind of authority to make required decisions. Of course, this is primarily applicable to parents/child relations. Schapiro, relying on her Kantian background, argues that lacking specific moral autonomy (authority to attribute decisions to one's own will) is the constitutive reason for why we treat someone as a child and have the obligation to educate them.

The same normative model has been replicated in schools and even in higher education (the mentor/student relation). Moreover, it could be argued that the same model is applicable whenever someone is not treated as an equally dignified member of a particular community of respect (see Helm 2017), like for example in the academic community

– where the student is yet to acquire authority through education (e.g. authority to decide if a theoretical argument is sound, how refined an artwork is, how good is an architectural project or what is the best course of an educational strategy). Of course, presuming that any adult (at least hypothetically) can withdraw their consent to being a member of such society and that we are not talking about general moral autonomy, but about authority in a specific area of social engagement.

It may look like I am recklessly widening Schapiro's conception of the child to different social spheres, but it is actually the opposite. Schapiro has developed her notion of the child from Kant's political philosophy, from *The Doctrine of Right* (Schapiro 1999: 718). One of her main arguments come from Kant's distinction between pre-political and political (civic) society. The former refers to the state of nature in which individuals both need and lack the capacity to make claims about right and justice, and thus have to "pull themselves together" to express general will and form a civic society (Schapiro 1999: 728; Kant MS, AA 06: 312–3). Schapiro suggests that for precisely the same reason the "undeveloped human beings are those who have yet to achieve the requisite form of integration" (Schapiro 1999: 728). Her second main argument comes from Kant's distinction between active and passive citizens. Passive citizens, according to Kant, are those who cannot partake in public life: minors (*vel naturaliter vel civiliter*), impoverished, economically dependent, (controversially) all women etc. (Kant MS, AA 06: 314). However, passive citizenship is for Kant a deviant state, it "seems to contradict the concept of a citizen as such" (Ibid.). Thus, Kant suggests that the state has a duty to help everyone to find their way up to active citizenship (Kant MS, AA 06: 326).[2] Schapiro argues for the twofold obligation principle in the adult/child relation: (1) obligation to help children work their way out of childhood and (2) obligation to refrain from acting in ways which hinder children's development as deliberators (Schapiro 1999: 735).

2 For an exploration of this argument in more detail see Nikolić & Cvejić 2017.

To sum it up, Schapiro claims that the main normative reason for adult/child relation is related to a specific lack of autonomy in immatures, but the same normative model (with some restrictions) applies for every situation in which education takes place. A child lacks its autonomy due to the incapacity to attribute decisions to one's own will, while adults may lack authority due to a lack of education in certain areas – what Schapiro calls "domains of discretion" (Schapiro 1999: 733–4). While Schapiro's focus is on the concept of the child, I am more interested in the normative basis of education in general.

It is worth remembering that Kant uses a metaphor of immaturity in a much wider context of societal emancipation: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one understanding without guidance from another" (Kant WA, AA 06: 35). Immediately, Kant suggests a difference to literal immaturity: "Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but rather of resolve and courage to use it without direction from another" (Ibid.). Obviously, Kant does not think that normative reasons for education disappear once we become adults, even if our predicament changes. He does not see a solution to this in paternalistic education, but rather in hope "that the public should enlighten itself" (Ibid.).

In the previous paragraph I explained the presuppositions that define the scope of this article. I presupposed that education could be understood as a relation between actors which is (normatively) based on the care for the development of one's autonomy or authority (in the relevant matter). This could certainly exclude some educational practices which are not normative (such as the mere cramming of information or mere training), but it certainly applies to all cases where education is needed, either for gaining moral autonomy, facing the societal challenges or exercising particular social engagements. My aim is not to neglect them, but to focus on such examples of educational practices which involve normative reasons. This clarification helps to

advance further the question of how relations in education should be emotionally colored.

"The Problem of Childhood"

This (quasi) paternalistic approach to education does not come without a price. It appears that any paternalism would be *prima facie* morally wrong. Even if we could accept such paternalism, it can justify only assistance to attain the autonomy through learning and not coercion to exercise it. However, the main problem is not the alleged moral incorrectness of paternalism, but the fact that it seems to contradict its own aims. If a child is to attain autonomy, it could not do this through mere tutelage, merely by guidance, as something that just happens to them. The problem with autonomy is not just about the correctness of decisions, but about their attributability – can one identify decisions as one's own and hold themselves responsible (Schapiro 2003: 592). Thus, autonomy cannot be acquired with a mere following of the correct decisions of the tutor, because reasons for doing it will always be external. At least partly, autonomy has to be exercised in order to be learned.

However, this will not work the other way around. Acquisition of autonomy cannot be simply the result of an action or series of actions of a person prior to acquiring it. This is because, before acquiring autonomy (or appropriate authority in the case of adult persons), one does not possess criteria for what decisions to measure as their own. Moreover, if one could acquire autonomy by mere action of one's own, there would be no need to learn it, and no need for education. Taking this into consideration, it could be argued that a child is in a paradoxical situation if he/she is to become an adult person: he/she cannot do it either by following outside guidance or by actions of their own. This predicament Schapiro calls "the problem of childhood" (Schapiro 1999, 2003). Like the previous conclusion made by Schapiro, this paradox also has its source in Kant:

> One of the greatest problems of education is how to unite submission to the necessary *restraint* with the child's capability of exercising *freewill* —for restraint is necessary. How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of restraint? I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of his freedom, and at the same time I am to guide him to use his freedom aright. (Kant Päd, AA 09: 453)

Schapiro sees the solution in the concept of *play*.[3] She offers several characterizations of play which explains its crucial role in the development of autonomy. It is only in play, according to her, that children are able to act the part of full agents:

> By engaging in play, children more or less deliberately "try on" selves to be and worlds to be in. This is because the only way a child can "have" a self is by trying one on. It is only by adopting one or another persona that children are able to act the part of full agents, to feel what it must be like to speak in their own voices and to inhabit their own worlds. […] Play is children's form of work, for their job is to become themselves. (Schapiro 1999: 732)

The second thing important to notice is that, according to Schapiro, play is the characteristic form of child's action:

> If action proper is conduct which issues from an established deliberative perspective, and if children have yet to develop such a perspective, then children are (at least across some essential domains) not in a position to act. But neither can they give up on action. As such, their only option is to play – to act the part, so to speak, of one who can act. Play is thus children's characteristic form of action; it is the form of action which is appropriate to them *qua* children. (Schapiro 1999: 732–3)

3 The notion of play has an important role in the history of education. A source of it is, again, Kant who used this concept as an aesthetic notion – with one of its main functions being precisely the harmonization of the rules of law with freedom (Kant KU, AA 05). From this discussion Shiller develops his letters on aesthetic education (Shiller 2004). Schapiro indicates that concept of play should not be seen here as an extension of Schiller's work and positions herself as "agnostic" regarding the question could her notion of play even be connected with Kant's concept (Schapiro 1999: 732).

The third important characteristic of play is its provisional status, or as Shapiro says "the status of a rehearsal or an experiment (even if it is not undertaken 'for fun')" (Schapiro 1999: 733). The provisional status of play justifies the modification of our reactive attitudes toward children. We do not take child's actions seriously as we do those of adults, which is due to its experimental nature. By experimenting, children have the opportunity to introduce their own principles of action, to create their own evaluative perspective, while at the same time, they are not treated as equally responsible as adults.

Adults also have a role in this play. They have to provide children with good models of autonomy to "choose" from and help children choose from these models. This is manifested through a twofold strategy. One part of it is to exercise limited discipline (rewards and punishments) in order to regulate children's choices:

> Discipline is one way of guiding such "choices", but in using disciplinary force, the idea should always be to act as a surrogate conscience. The pain of discipline, like that of conscience, must serve to awaken children to a sense of their own freedom and responsibility rather than to remind them of their subjection to an external authority. (Schapiro 1999: 736)

The other part of the strategy is to explain the relevant principles behind these limitations:

> […] we are to explain to children the principles behind the limits we impose on them. Moreover, to the extent they are capable of raising principled objections to those limits, we are to evaluate those objections with an open mind. (Ibid.)

These two parts, of course, interact and accompany each other in order to help children to be free to control themselves.

There are at least two problems with this strategy that I will just

briefly address. The first concern is the possibility of adults differentiating if a child's action actually has a provisional status of play. It seems that we need to know whether children are acting "playfully" or seriously in order to be able to estimate the appropriate level of accountability (Helm 2007:218). Without it we will never have a reason to hold them responsible. Schapiro's distinction between provisional and proper action does not provide us with such reasons. More important problem is to understand how are we able to intervene, especially when things are already going wrong. In other words, the problem is in how to motivate children to act from their own authority. We might correct some of children's "deviant" motivations (e.g. selfish interest) through reward/punishment mechanism. However, it is not clear how these reasons could ever be their own and not external. We might instruct children to be helpful to others, but the act would again come from selfish reasons – to receive reward and avoid punishment. If we are to explain principles of action that should be adopted, it remains unclear why children should adopt them rather than react to it negatively (e.g. "I understand it, but I simply do not care", Cf Helm 2009: 218–9).

This does not mean that we are helpless to help children develop their autonomy. Rather, it indicates that Schapiro failed to address the relationship between parents and children. This emotional relationship which implies mutual care is crucial for understanding how children can access the reasons they previously did not have.

Care for Well-Being and Care About an Agent as Such

Whatever approach to the question of necessity of education we might take, it presupposes certain relations of care. Above all, an educator cares for their protégés, or parents care for the well-being of their child. Note that this care can also be instrumental, e.g. if educator's care for pupil is merely because this is what he/she is paid for. This distinction is not important here. Even if that is the case, a teacher is expected to care for pupils as a part of their job. As the above argument shows,

care should at least partially address the development of the autonomy and authority of one who is educated. It doesn't mean that educators should be particularly emotional and oversensitive. The point is that such care is part of the normative situation. By entering the educational process, an educator has taken a duty to care about the development of those who are under their guidance. In that sense, it would not be rational for an educator not to feel the specific appropriate emotion of care in relevant situations, i.e. it would be wrong.

This care could be understood as care for well-being. It is especially the case when we talk about parents' care for their children. However, the well-being of a person can be understood in many different ways. Someone could think, for example, that well-being is a matter of understanding and adopting fairness. We could also refer to physical or economic well-being. Nevertheless, all these conceptions of well-being presuppose that educator possesses a conception of the good. This is the same conception of the good he/she should convey. A part of well-being of a person could also be their autonomy. However, if we speak about the development of autonomy, we have to go beyond mere care for the well-being and beyond the educator's conception of well-being, i.e. educator has to care about protégés as (potential) agents.

What does it mean to care about others as agents? It means that we accept that others have their own preferences, desires, focuses, their own cares and evaluative perspectives. To care about others as agents means that their objectives, also have import for me, or that I share their import and care for those things that have import for them. Thus, caring about someone as an agent means that you don't just care merely for his/her well-being, but also for the things he or she cares about. In other words, it presupposes dynamical intentionality toward someone else and his/her evaluative perspective, in relation to which we constitute our subfocuses. Practically, it means that what primarily has import to someone else, has import to me, through the fact that he/she, as a subject of import, has import for me.

> When I get a paper rejected because of an undeservedly negative referee report, my anger consists in the feeling of the import of my scholarship as such impressing itself on me in the present circumstances in such a way that I am pained by the offense that rejection presents […]. Such anger differs from the anger I would feel on behalf of a colleague I care about in similar circumstances […]. Thus in being angry on her behalf, the pain I feel consists in part in the feeling not only of the import she (the focus) has to me but also of the import her scholarship (the subfocus) has to her, so that the rejection feels bad because of its bearing on the well-being of both her scholarship and her; in this respect my anger on her behalf differs phenomenologically from my anger at my own paper's rejection. (Helm 2009: 89)

This short excursion of explaining the different types of care could help us to understand more deeply the relation between an educator and those who are being educated. The work on developing one's autonomy presupposes care about other as agent (even if it is being just a therapeutic entitlement). It is by caring for what the student cares about that an educator affirmatively influences the development of autonomy. Educator has to be able to exercise relevant emotions related to the student's projects. For example, a mentor should care for his student's care about doing a Ph.D. in feminism and become frustrated if this project hits an obstacle – not because he cares for feminism as a topic, but because he should care for feminism as a part of his care for his student. On the contrary, if a mentor cares only for his own conception of the wellbeing of his student and, for example, imposes the topic on her, the mentoring would be mere tutelage.

Access to External Reasons

The previous argument can solve only part of the problem. Care about pupils as (at least potential) agents could save them from being exposed to the paternalistic hegemony. However, this argument cannot answer why a student should be motivated to adopt the educator's model. The whole problem comes down to the fact that rea-

sons for acting in a different way would ever be educator's reason and not their own – it would be external to them. Of course, the previous argument doesn't claim that an educator will persistently have a positive attitude towards students' desires. Students' desires could come in conflict with the educator's conception of well-being (e.g. the concept of fairness) and in that case, the educator has to find a way to influence student's valuation with his own concept, without undermining their autonomy. If these reasons are a force external to a student, then we find ourselves again in the problem of childhood.

Now it is time to introduce the second part of the relations which is normatively expected in educational process: the care of the students about the teacher, or more precisely about his/her own conception of the relevant good. One of the main assumptions of education is that teacher knows more – without it the education as we know it would make no sense. However, the teacher's knowledge or evaluations could be entirely foreign to students. Except in the case in which a student cares about what a teacher cares for. In caring about a teacher, a student should be able to care for the teacher's concepts (e.g. that of fairness) in the way the teacher cares about it and because the teacher cares about it. In doing so, the pupil doesn't need to have this concept elaborated. His/her care for fairness is just a matter of his/her commitment to teacher's care. This interpersonal relation enables students to access reasons that might seem external to them (teacher's reasons). As a part of this care, a student might get frustrated in the name of the teacher because he/she is acting unfairly even if he/she doesn't fully understand this concept. It is through these shared concerns that the student begins to adopt the teacher's model of acting, that is, to learn (Cf Helm 2009: 237).

Note that Helm's solution to the problem of childhood is very much different from Schapiro's two-pronged strategy. Motivation for adopting the educator's model is not imposed externally (through punishment or rewards), but it is rather rooted in interpersonal relations between teacher and students through their shared emotional concerns. Accord-

ing to Helm, this is the only way we can escape the problem of childhood:

> […] I have argued, through a properly paternalistic loving relationship the parent can impose rational pressure on the child so as to instill certain cares and values in her; given the shared concerns and the way in which the parent's concepts inform those concerns, such an imposition is not the result merely of external forces acting on the child but is rather a means of enabling the child's conscience, her sense of responsibility for her cares, her actions, and her identity. Moreover, it is only because reasons are at stake (rather than mere external force) that we can make sense of those having access to those reasons as being potentially responsible for the outcome. To the extent that the child's access to these reasons is essentially interpersonal, so too is the responsibility for her coming (or failing to come) to care about or value appropriate objects: that responsibility is to that extent shared between the child and the parent. (Helm 2009: 259)

Education as Joint Engagement: Final Remarks

In the previous chapters, I have presented Helm's solution to the problem of childhood, introduced by Shapiro. Helm argued for the crucial role of emotional relations between child and parent in solving the problem. It is through this emotional relation of care that educators pursue their care, not merely about imposed conception of the well-being of a child, but also about cares and projects the child has, and *vice versa*. By caring about what parents care about, children get access to reasons that would otherwise remain external to them. This is of particular importance, because if those reasons remain external, education would always remain trapped in the problem of childhood, for children would not have proper motivation to act.

In my view, this same problem can be found in educational processes. Thus, it seems that the relation of mutual care is a necessary condition for effective education (presupposing that reasons for education are normative). Of course, it is not a loving relationship like between parents and children. It might seem

that the proper description would be to understand this relationship as an asymmetric quasi-friendship type of relationship.

However, it is not only problematic to view student/teacher relation as friendship, but it could also be something impossible to achieve in large educational institutions. The first problem is that it is hard to achieve friendship with a large amount of students. The second problem is that friendship could undermine teacher's authority. The third problem is that it might seem peculiar to think that this relation could so easily influence other domains of one's life, as it happens in friendship. On the other side, it might be the case to have a problem in private life influence the educational process.

The better alternative could be to understand educational processes as joint engagements. Educational processes are, certainly, collective efforts, those in which each actor (both students and teachers) partake with their tasks. As a part of the collective body, they also share concerns about each other. This doesn't mean that they are to establish intimate identification as friends do. Rather, other actors (in the educational process) are identified as those who belong to it, as "one of us" (Cf Helm 2009). "Being one of us" presupposes certain care about others as agents, as a part of our care for the collective efforts we are in.

This interpretation makes it possible to correctly understand normativity embedded in emotional relations between students and a teacher. There is certainly no obligation for their friendship, but they have to treat each other as "one of us". Normative demands imposed by the very acknowledgment of an educational process as a collective effort, are to take care of this collective action as plural, as "ours". It is from this care that we are committed to caring about other actors of this process as "one of us". This is what constitutes the rationale of emotional relations in educational processes. These are precisely the kind of emotional relationships that are necessary to fulfill the normative role of education – the development of one's autonomy and authority.

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