



A student's right to freedom of education



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Abstract

This conceptual essay, which opens the special issue, examines why a student's right to freedom of education – the right for a student to define their own education – is so crucial for the education itself. Four diverse educational approaches are considered: training, closed socialization, open socialization, and critical examination, along with the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy to reveal the need for freedom of education within each of the approaches and the pedagogy. The eight aspects of the right to freedom are explicated. Three major objections against the right are considered and rebuked: 1) the Kantian paradox of autonomy and paternalism in education, 2) the paradox of learning and ignorance, and 3) fear of non-participation in education without coercion. The legitimate limitations of the right are discussed. Finally, the two major pathways to the right – radical and gradual – are analyzed.

I sent the earlier draft of the paper to the Dialogic Pedagogy journal community, asking for critical commentaries. Many people submitted their critical commentaries involving their agreements, disagreements, associative readings, extensions, evaluations, and so on. My paper, their commentaries and my reply constitute this special issue. Three people – David Kirshner, Belkacem TAIEB, and Jim Rietmulder – chose to provide commentaries on the margins. I included most of their comments on the margins as a new genre to promote a critical dialogue in our readers. Also, Belkacem TAIEB and Matthew Shumski submitted short commentaries that I included, below, at the end of this article as Appendix I and II. Jim Cresswell shared the manuscript with his undergraduate psychology students, and one student volunteered to add her commentary. Shelly Price-Jones shared it with her international undergraduate students studying English at a South Korean university. Twenty-one of them chose to provide a video reply. I selected a few of them that attracted my attention. Finally, I chose to address some of the issues brought in the presented critical commentaries either as my reply on the margins or at the end of this special issue. This should not be taken as “the final word” in the debate, but rather a dialogic response inviting other responses in the authors and in the audience.

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Acknowledgment

This article was inspired by an online discussion initiated by Jim Cresswell on the Dialogic Pedagogy Facebook group about his university forcing the students and faculty not to use personal technology (laptops, tablets, computers, phones) for some period of time – except when the personal

technology addresses students' disabilities or deficits¹. I want to thank Ana Marjanovic-Shane, Armando Marino Filho, Danyang Li, Bryan Campbell, and Bob Hampel for extensive discussions about this issue and subtopics with me. I am very thankful for all commentators for engaging in the critical dialogue with my article and ideas (and editing of my text).



Introduction: Thesis for freedom of education

My main thesis here is rather straightforward: students must have the exclusive right to freely define their own education. This thesis goes beyond the right of all students having access to good education, although it includes that. In negative terms, my thesis bans foisted education, imposed curriculum, and thrust instruction. In positive terms, I insist that it is students who are the principal authors of their own education. Education must occur on the students' terms because *education is primarily the personal business of the student*. All other parties and spheres – society, state, taxpayers, educational experts and practitioners, parents, economy, social justice, democracy, patriotism, nationalism, healthcare, etc. – their important interests, urgent concerns, and exciting visions (including my own as a particular dialogic pedagogy educator), are secondary or auxiliary for education. Of course, like in any case of the rights, at times, other priorities – like, for example, safety, fairness, social justice, demands from other spheres of human life – must take over education and students' right for freedom of education. But in each of these cases, it has to be understood that this legitimate priority of another sphere compromises education as such rather than proclaimed that it is done in the name of it.

My use of the term “freedom of education” is different from its use in the literature. Often “freedom of education” is referred to a concern about “how to accommodate the different demands of a growing number of non-Western immigrants” (Karsten, 2006, p. 23) and minorities – i.e., some limited curricular freedom, – the professional independence of educational institutions from the state censorship (Petó, 2018), or providing parents with a school choice (Varjo, Kalalahti, & Silvennoinen, 2014). My term is different, shifting the locus of control and ownership of education to a student from the society, state, local ethnic community, or parents (cf. Douglas, 1991).

Similarly, the term “foisted education” requires clarification. Education can be forced on a student by circumstances, and the student might not have much choice but to engage in it. For example, very young children often do not have a choice to learn their native language because young children are “thrown” into a particular linguistic environment. In another example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many people are faced with the medical necessity to learn a new practice of social distancing, at least those who agree on it as a *medical* necessity rather than an arbitrary governmental imposition. All these cases of a lack of educational choice for the student do NOT constitute the phenomenon of “foisted education” I am talking about here because the student's education is still driven by the student's agency of their realization of the environment and/or necessities. The phenomenon of “foisted education” is defined by the designers of education for the student, who is not the student: the society, state, local community, educational experts, teachers, parents, and so on. These designers decide for the student: whether the student must engage in education, when, under what conditions, what to study, how to study, with whom to study, and so on. In foisted education, the student is positioned as an object rather than a subject of education.

My justification for the thesis is existential rather than pragmatic or liberty-based. I am not going to argue here that students' freedom of education will pragmatically improve educational outcomes, although

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DPJ.two/permalink/2761274623915932/>

it might be often true, at least in some cases. Similarly, I won't argue that the realization of human liberties requires students' freedom of education. However, it might be true that freedom of education – together with freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, etc. – constitutes the basic human rights. In contrast, I argue here that students' right to freedom of education is the essence of education itself. In other words, I argue that education requires freedom. Education requires students to define their own education. Education primarily is the business of a student, and not the state, the public, the taxpayers, teachers, school, economy, education scholars, or parents. The role of the state is to ensure that every student has access to the quality of education as defined and judged by the student themselves (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016b). Not having this freedom injures education. Being and the process of education demand freedom.

The structure of the article is the following. First, I consider why education needs freedom. Second, I unpack the notion of the students' academic freedom. Third, I provide known objections against the students' right to define their own education and try to rebuke them. Forth, I discuss possible limitations of the students' right to freedom of education. Finally, in conclusion, I ponder about a path of achieving the students' right to freedom of education.

Why is a student's freedom needed for education?

I argue here that education requires a student to define their own education – i.e., freedom of education. But what is education? Education is a contested concept. People define it differently, depending on their approach to education, often disagree with each about the core educational values. I argue that, however education is defined, it inherently requires freedom of the student to make decisions about their own education.

My colleague and I have abstracted the following four distinguished definitions and their corresponding practices of education: training, closed socialization, open socialization, and critical examination – some of which we criticized and some of which we endorsed (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012). I argue that, regardless of how desirable or undesirable these diverse approaches, all these abstracted four educational approaches need a student's freedom for education, but, as I show below, they may need it differently. In addition, being a Bakhtinian dialogic educator, below, I consider the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy as a special realization of open socialization and critical examination (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019).

Training involves the acquisition of discrete, self-contained, decontextualized skills, and knowledge. For example, learning how to use a TV remote control or rules of the addition of fractions with different denominators can be done and often are done through training. Similarly, the fact that the Earth rotates around the Sun is usually done via training as a way of recognition of a discursive pattern – without necessarily ever considering conflicting ideas about the relativity of the movement (Lemke, 1990; Matusov, 2020c). When successful, training produces more or less identical performers, which can be verified by tests and exams. Arguably, conventional schooling/pedagogy is heavily based on training, although it may not be true for some innovative schooling/pedagogy: progressive and democratic.

Closed socialization² entails students' socialization into a well-defined normative practice. Learning driving a car is probably a good example of closed socialization. Driving a car is a well-defined normative practice structured by traffic signs and traffic rules. However, the driving actions are not discrete and self-

² Colloquially, closed socialization is often confused with training. For example, it is commonly pronounced "teacher training," "nurse training," "pilot training," and so on, which I view as "closed socialization" and not as "training."

contained, but rather holistic, embodied, contextual, and relational, at times requiring driver's situational judgments and negotiating the road with other drivers. It is also embedded in other related practices like getting and negotiating car insurance, a driver's legal responsibilities, filling the car with gas, using credit cards, paying special taxes, bringing the car for inspection and maintenance/repairs, and so on. Education as closed socialization has been studied by sociocultural scholars producing a conceptual framework of "apprenticeship," "observations," "peripheral participation," "transfer of responsibility," "community of practice," and so on (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Closed socialization might produce different stylistic "identities" for the participants – e.g., "aggressive driver," "careful driver," "defensive driver," "impulsive driver." Still, closed socialization remains highly normative, where creativity is rarely appreciated, legitimized, or encouraged³.

Open socialization is based on students' socialization into ill-defined practices, essentially requiring the participants' creativity, authorial judgment, voice, and dialogue. For example, learning creative arts is often open socialization. Creative, originality, voice, authorship, and judgment are both encouraged and appreciated. These practices, however, diverse they might be, often require authorial judgments from the participants fit the unique circumstances transcending the given guidelines, rules, and norms. The participants are viewed as unique and irreplaceable. The existing, given structures, norms, conventions, strategies, knowledge, skills, models, and masterpieces have to be learned, only to be transcended by the learners and through the learners' own creative transcendence. The primary focus of education as open socialization is on promoting a student's creative authorship in a targeted practice.

Critical examination originates in the famous motto by Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato & Riddell, 1973). In contrast to the all three approaches above, education is viewed deconstructively, as a critical examination of the life, self, society, culture, and the world (and, of course, education itself). To be critical, this examination has to be embedded in a critical dialogue where ideas, worldviews, knowledge, values, and skills are tested against alternative ideas, worldviews, knowledge, values, and skills. Any construction of knowledge and skills by the learners is by-productive and accidental to the critical deconstructive process. Like in open socialization, each learner is viewed as a unique author (of critical deconstruction). The primary focus of education as a critical examination is on promoting a student's critical authorship.

A particular educational practice can be a hybrid of several educational paradigmatic approaches described above. Also, boundaries among the listed educational approaches can be blurry at times. My colleague Ana Marjanovic-Shane and I do not claim that our educational typology of the four approaches to education – training, closed socialization, open socialization, and critical examination – is exhaustive (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012). Additional approaches may exist or emerge in the future. Guided by my thesis, I argue that it is primarily up to a student, and not to the teacher, institution, state, or society, to subscribe to a particular paradigmatic educational approach listed above or to a mixture of them as well as to modify their subscription at any time.

The Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy involves the participants addressing each other while having a genuine interest in each other as unique human beings and in each other's ideas. It views dialogue ontologically as a way of being in the world (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov, 2009; Sidorkin, 1999). The participants in an ontological dialogue are expected to be surprised by each other and by themselves. Bakhtin saw the sense-making process as essentially dialogic: as an ephemeral relationship between an interested, information-seeking, question of one person and a serious and honest reply of another person (Bakhtin,

³ Socialization in car racing represents a case of *open* socialization, see below, exactly because creativity and uniqueness is welcomed in the practice.

1986). Ontological dialogue is eventful, involving “the consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6). The Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy is a particular realization of open socialization and critical examination, aiming at promoting student's creative and/or critical authorship.

Each of the listed paradigmatic approaches to education demands a student's freedom of education. However, the nature of the required freedom is different in each paradigmatic approach, although often overlapping. Thus, the critical examination requires a student's freedom of deconstruction of ideas, values, and worldviews. Meanwhile, training requires a student's freedom to commit to training. Below I consider these relationships starting with the strongest in education as critical examination and proceed to the weakest relationship as training.

Freedom in education as a critical examination

Probably, the strongest demand for a student's freedom to define their own education is in education as a critical examination approach. In this approach, the student is the ultimate author of the critical examination of their life, self, world, culture, and society, including their own education. The critical examination cannot be assigned by the others, but only self-assigned.

Nevertheless, a critical examination can be provoked by a teacher, and this is the biggest temptation for some progressive educators, who might want to engage their students' critical examination through dialogic provocations, whether the students want it or not. One of the first such progressive educators was arguably Socrates, who was the first known philosopher who defined critical examination and who wanted to engage all his fellow citizens of Athens in this critical examination (Matusov, 2009, see chapters 1 and 2). Another temptation is coming from the social justice minded educators who want their students to become good citizens through critical pedagogy – to become free from bigotry, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia, and so on through the students' critical examination of their own dear ideas and values, which are often full of invisible and unexamined oppressive prejudices. These educators want to use critical examination to cure their students of “oppressive consciousness” or “false consciousness,” which promotes injustice. A good example of that, of course, is the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1986).

What is wrong with these two pedagogical temptations? Ironically, both progressive and social justice educators severely curtail education for critical examination by trying to make students to want what the educators want them to want. In the case of progressive educator Socrates, he wanted his students (e.g., Meno, Anytus) to get involved in a critical examination of their lives, whether they wanted (e.g., Meno) or not (e.g., Anytus). According to Plato's account (Plato & Bluck, 1961), Socrates was successful with Meno but not with Anytus. In his critique of Socrates' progressivism, analyzing the village life of simple Muslim fishermen, modern political philosopher Kukathas argues that Socrates' motto, “The unexamined life is not worth living” disregards the possibilities that sometimes the unexamined life might be worth living, while the examined life might not be worth living (Kukathas, 2001, 2003). Without students' freedom to engage in an exploration of and experiential experimentation with alternatives to the examined life and education as critical examination, the very education as the critical examination itself will suffer. The teacher's locking the student into critical examination robs the student from in-depth critical examination because in-depth critical examination requires the transcendence of the critical examination itself – i.e., students' consideration and experience of its alternatives to the critical examination.

In the case of social justice educator Freire, he wanted the oppressed (and even the oppressors) to become involved in education as critical examination aiming at liberation of the oppressed from their false consciousness directly or indirectly imposed on them by their oppressor. This social justice version of

the preset educational endpoint as making all people good, free from oppressing prejudice, is problematic from the critical examination vista for several reasons. First, making people predictably good through education or some other means **strips people off their agency** to make their own moral choices when these moral choices are disagreeable with the teachers' ones. In one of my past classes, my students debated an issue raised by one of the peers: whether Hitler's teachers were responsible for his crimes against humanity. Some students, probably, guided by ideas of the Enlightenment and the social justice, argued that since the purpose of education is to make students good, Hitler's teachers clearly failed this goal, and, thus, they were (fully or partially) responsible for his crimes. Other students disagreed, arguing that education must inform students so they can make informed choices, including informed moral choices. For this perspective, Hitler's teachers might or might not be responsible, depending on how successful they were informing him. Still, being informed does not preclude an educational alumnus from making bad or even evil choices. One of the students from the second group made a powerful and passionate speech arguing from a **religious** position that "making people good" is super disrespectful for human agency, making people predictable "robots," and, she argued, even God does not want to do that leaving people with free will (Matusov & Lemke, 2015).

Another problem with social justice critical education is that alternatives to the oppressor-oppressed binary are not considered. Not everything in life is rooted in the oppressor-oppressed totality. Life is not limited to liberation from oppression. Also, this social justice approach excludes the possibilities of situations when being the oppressed might lack of virtue, while being the oppressor might have virtue. Oppression might not be limited to the oppressor-oppressed binary. In other words, the totality of the oppressor-oppressed binary itself is reductive and thus severely limits critical examination of the life, self, world, and society, including education itself.

What if it is a student and not a teacher (or school, or state) who chooses to be progressive or social justice based in education as critical examination? Would not all the critique, provided above, be applied to the student as the author of their own education? If so, would the student's freedom of education be failing the student's critical examination no less than other educators would? Why would the self-imposed limitations of critical examinations be better (better for what?) than the limitations imposed by others?

In my response to these important and valid questions, I argue that a student's self-imposition of the limitations on their own critical examination of the life, self, society, culture, world, and their own education is still better than the imposition by other because the student better preserves their own educational agency, which is so important, so necessary for education as critical examination. **First, it is the student, and not others, who makes a meta-decision to limit their own critical examination.** **Second, it is the student and not others who applies the imposition of these limitations on themselves.** Third, it is up to the student and not somebody else who decides what to prioritize to focus on their critical examination. Fourth, it is the student who can draw the line where to stop their critical examination (cf. "The Centipede's Dilemma⁴"). Fifth, at any moment, the student has **the right to change their mind** without any pressure, pedagogical violence, or threat of pedagogical violence by others. Sixth, it is much easier for the self-imposing student to engage in a dialogue about the nature and goodness of the self-imposed limitations with other than a student on whom the limitations are imposed by others. Thus, the self-imposed limitations may constitute important experiences of alternative ideas for the student's consecutive testing diverse ideas about their education.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Centipede%27s_Dilemma

In sum, education as a critical examination resists any impositions, positive goals, and limitations for its power of critical examination, including a critical examination of critical examination. It requires considering, testing, and, thus, partial or even full experiencing uncomfortable, unpleasant, and even potentially damaging alternatives – nothing is out of reach for a learner's critical outlook in a dialogue with others and themselves to leave no stone unturned, at least, in principle and in the potentiality. Freedom to choose an alternative paradigmatic approach to education or no education at all is a part of testing ideas in the critical examination.

Freedom in education as open socialization

Why is a student's freedom to define their own education needed for open socialization? Education as open socialization focuses on promoting students' creative voices in the targeted, ill-defined practice. In open socialization, creativity is viewed as a legitimate process for a newcomer. Creativity is out-of-box thinking, feeling, relating, talking, imaging, and acting. It involves a student's transcendence of the given – mostly the *socially and culturally* given on the macro or micro scales – recognized and appreciated by other and/or the student themselves (Matusov, 2011a; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016a). Creativity and, thus, open socialization require the student's freedom to define what creativity and open socialization are, – hence, their own education.

However, in order for a student to engage in creativity – i.e., in transcending the given recognized by others – this given has to be known to the student. Some educators guiding open socialization want to define and impose the curriculum of the culturally important given on the students. They often sequence open socialization into a two-phase process: 1) the student must learn the important ready-made culture (e.g., learning musical notes, mechanics of playing piano), and 2) only when this mastery has been achieved, the educators allow the student to engage in creativity. Although this pedagogical approach does not deny students' creativity, agency, authorship, and freedom, it postpones them (Matusov, von Duyke, & Kayumova, 2016). The major problem with this pedagogical approach is that the educators' arrest of the student's creative authorial agency until learning mastery of the culturally given is achieved, which may severely damage or compromise the student's agency. Even more, during the first phase, the student may lose their interest in the targeted practice and in their own creativity altogether. "At the same time, the educators may not recognize the student's own transcendence of the student's given – because it may look to the educator as a 'mistake of ignorance' or some lower type of cognition (Piaget, Vygotsky) – because the student does not know the important cultural and social givens. This is the case when children's metaphors are taken as mistakes. Thus, the educators are not in a position to promote the students' creative transcendence by recognizing it as such" (Marjanovic-Shane, personal communication, March 30, 2020).

Alternatively, some other educators engage a student in both processes at the same time: learning the relevant cultural given while promoting the student's creativity (Reardon & Mollin, 2009; Schaefer-Simmern, 1948). For example, while learning to play the piano, a student is encouraged by the teacher to improvise. Also, student's mistakes are treated by the educator with the ambivalence of hunting for creative gems. In this approach, the student's agency is stimulated and encouraged while the student masters the given, predefined by the educators. The student's creative authorial agency is stimulated and promoted all the time, while the educator imposes the curriculum, education, and, to a lesser degree, instruction, and assessment on the student. The main problem with this pedagogical approach is that creativity is bounded by its material. Each material – culturally given – affords its own creativity. Selecting the specific material is a part of the creative process (Bakhtin, 1990). When the teacher selects and imposes the material that the student must learn to master and transcend, the teacher severely curtails the student's creativity. This is very clear for sophisticated and recognized creative people. Switching a type of the material of their creativity: painting for creative musicians, music for creative writers with high probability will either destroy

or severely damage their creative self-expression. The issue here is not just the familiarity with the material, but the selectivity of the material by the author as a part of the creativity itself, who must be the student and not the teacher. The effect of the choice of the material on creativity may be even stronger for the novices.

I argue that the problem of the student's self-imposition of either the two-phase process, described above or the rigidity of the material choice in open socialization is much less severe, although still might be present, than when these impositions are external to the student. The student's self-impositions, especially if they are temporary, can be a part of an experiential, experimental creative process of trying different ideas of their own education as open socialization. The student's self-impositions involve a meta-decision and are usually free from pedagogical violence, as the student is in full control of their own agency, even when this agency is colonized by various pedagogical ideas. Yes, without engaging in critical examination, it might be more difficult for the student to notice and address this colonization, but without external impositions, the student has the freedom to switch to different educational approaches on a whim.

Freedom in education as closed socialization

As we are sliding down to more rigid educational approaches, the role of a student's freedom becomes less salient, yet not negligible. I argue that the student's most prominent freedom in closed socialization is the freedom to realize their own goals through the tight norms and structures of a targeted, highly normative practice. The first example that comes to my mind is for a student to socialize in their native or foreign language, with regard to its rather rigid conventional structures, norms, and rules in a situation when the participants focus on the normative correctness of language rather than on the pragmatic comprehension. Successful socialization in language means that a novice can say what they want to say within the strict linguistic, agreement-based, norms. Also, a successful understanding of the learned language means the novice's active interpretation of the heard message into diverse contexts, again within strict normative frames. Closed socialization cannot be fully successful when a student does not own it. Essentially, successful closed socialization involves the holistic merger of the student's goal- and context-defining process and the tight norms and structures of the targeted practice in particular, often unique, situations. Pedagogical impeding the student's learning activism and improvisation in this merger, and, thus, the student's freedoms associated with it, impedes closed socialization itself. Closed socialization with a student's activism and freedom to define their own goals, impeded by teachers, makes the student act like a zombie in the targeted practice, without much spirit. This reminds me of my learning English as a foreign language in the Soviet Union.

We studied to memorize phrases like, "Pete and Mary are friends. Does Pete have a friend? Yes, he does. Mary is Pete's friend. Does Mary have a friend? Yes, she does. Pete is Mary's friend. Pete and Mary are friends." In a high school, we memorized the history of the Young Communist League (Komsomol) written in English. In both cases, started with a pure training, the memorized phrases were extended by the English teachers' novice questions about "Pete and Mary" or about the Komsomol which allowed the Soviet students to abstract and practice linguistic patterns and rules of English in new contexts, guided by disinterested normative situations and the official Communist ideology. Needless to say, not only my English was super limited, many of my classmates and I hated it in school.

In contrast, my wife studied English in a specialized school in the USSR, where the main focus was on students' and teachers' self-expression in English to the point that some regular academic subjects were taught in English as well, and the students spoke English with each other and their teachers during their recesses. Still, her school exams and many assignments were focused on the formal norms and rules of English. She loved learning English exactly because her closed socialization, embedded in open socialization, in English legitimately involved and welcomed her agency of self-expression. When Russian

philosopher and literary theoretician Mikhail Bakhtin had to teach the formal rules and norms of Russian in a Soviet middle and high school, in his innovative dialogic pedagogy, he also successfully wrapped closed socialization into open one (Bakhtin, 2004).

In addition, although closed socialization requires a student learning the mastery of a highly normative and highly structured practice, this mastery is impossible without the student assuming a unique social position in practice recognized by other people – oldtimers, novices, and even external observers. A sociocultural linguist, Jim Gee, introduced the notion of Discourse with a capital D:

The notion of “Big ‘D’ Discourse” (“Discourse” spelled with a capital “D”) is meant to capture the ways in which people enact and recognize socially and historically significant identities or “kinds of people” through well-integrated combinations of language, actions, interactions, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values. The notion stresses how “discourse” (language in use among people) is always also a “conversation” among different historically formed Discourses (that is, a “conversation” among different socially and historically significant kinds of people or social groups). The notion of “Big ‘D’ Discourse” sets a larger context for the analysis of “discourse” (with a little “d”), that is, the analysis of language in use (Gee, 2015, p. 418).

In closed socialization, a student creates their unique participatory “accent” or “personal style” in the Discourse (with a capital “D”) regarding the targeted highly normative practice. This unique participatory accent or style in the Discourse is never given to the student. Rather, it is the student’s task to develop it. Without educators’ legitimization of the student’s freedom to develop this unique participatory personal Discourse accent, it becomes difficult for their learning the normative practice and, thus, their closed socialization.

When closed socialization, with or without the help of educators, is initiated and owned by the student, the merger of the goal-defining process and the practice’s norms is facilitated by the student’s own activism and freedoms. The same is true about the process of the student’s development of their unique participatory personal accent or style. Owning closed socialization allows the student to make decisions of how much and when the student wants to transcend the boundaries of closed socialization to move it to creative open socialization and/or to the critical examination of the targeted practice making their education deeper. When closed socialization is controlled and owned by an educator, both processes are often inhibited. In addition, in the latter case, the student may develop resistance to the educator’s guiding efforts.

Freedom in education as training

Why is a student’s self-initiated and self-owned training better than training imposed by the teacher, for the sake of training itself? I claim the following three major mutually related reasons: relevancy, sensitive guidance, and motivation. When a student chooses the training curriculum – e.g., passing an SAT test for a college desired by the student, learning how a remote control works to manage Roku, using Zoom for online teaching in the coronavirus pandemic, – this self-initiated learning and its content is relevant for the student. This relevance guides the student’s learning by setting goals important for the student and provides the student with authentic formative assessment to see whether the student’s probing actions lead to accomplishing these goals or not and, if not, what has to be changed. This relevance mobilizes the student’s learning activism by asking themselves and their educators challenging and meaningful questions such as “how can I return back to the main menu on Roku,” which makes the educators’ guidance sensitive. The educators address the questions asked by the student – the questions that the student is really interested in and cares about – rather than the educators addressing imagined questions that the student might not be interested in nor ready to ask at this moment, as it often occurs in imposed training. Answering the

student's real questions makes the educators' guidance sensitive to the student's on-demand educational needs. When faced with frustration or when efforts are needed, the student may invest more in the training of their choice than in foisted training. In self-initiated training, the student's motivation *is rooted* in their authorial agency (Matusov, von Duyke, et al., 2016) – their desires and is self-managed, – even if this motivation is extrinsic and instrumental (like, for example, passing an SAT test). In imposed training, the motivation is usually unrooted from their authorial agency to be managed by somebody else.

In contrast to self-imposed training, foisted training is often irrelevant, insensitive, and not very motivating, making training difficult for the student. Also, foisted training usually does not allow the student to move freely among all four paradigms of education – i.e., critical examination, open and closed socialization, and training itself – which often makes training shallow and difficult for the student.

Freedom in the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy

A student's right to freedom of education – to define their own education – is the core of the Bakhtinian dialogic education, based on “the consciousnesses with the equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6). The equality of the rights for the participants' consciousnesses means that the participants in educational dialogue have equal rights to join or leave the dialogue, define and change its topic, reply or remain silent, introduce ideas and values of their choices, and so on. It also means that they take seriously each other, expecting to be surprised by each other. They try to avoid treating each other as objects or means for their actions (cf. Kant), including a teacher's treating a student as an object of their pedagogical actions. Curricular endpoints preset by the teacher in advance (e.g., “by the end of the lesson, the students will acquire the following knowledge and skills...” – a typical lesson plan statement in conventional teaching) are illegitimate in an ontological dialogue and, thus, in the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy and neither foisted education and imposed curriculum. Rather, the teacher can invite their students to the teacher's dialogic open-ended provocations, pregnant with students' replies unexpected by the teacher, offer alternative ideas and values, promote testing and examination the students' dear ideas and values, encourage the students' creative and/or critical authorship, support the emergence of the students' unique voices, response to the students' request for help, and so on. All this support and guidance has to be consented by the students in an ontological dialogue (Matusov et al., 2019). In sum, the Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy is unthinkable without a student's right to define their own education.

Students' academic freedoms: Unpacking

Elsewhere, my colleague Ana Marjanovic-Shane and I (Matusov, 2020b, chapter 10; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019) developed the organizational principles for organized education aimed at promoting the right to freedom of education⁵. These principles are based on the following multidimensional academic freedoms and rights of students:

1. Curriculum: Freedom for a student to decide what to learn.
2. Instruction: Freedom for a student to decide how, when, where, and with whom to learn and ask for guidance.
3. Participation: Freedom for a student to engage or disengage, freedom to learn or not to learn, freedom of a no-fault divorce from any teacher or learning community.
4. Valuation: Freedom for a student to determine what is or is not important for the student to study or to do, the quality, and the purpose of their education.
5. Ecology: A right for a student to have access to and opportunity for a rich and safe educational environment and guidance, pregnant with and supportive of diverse discourses, practices, and

⁵ The text below is heavily based on these published chapters and is a revised version of it.

values.

6. Role: Freedom for a student to define what kind of student they want to be in every particular situation and overall (e.g., a credential student, a self-responsible critical learner, an other-responsible critical learner, a creative learner, an autodidact, an apprentice).
7. Paradigm: Freedom for a student to choose an educational paradigm, to mix them in any way, and flexibly move among them.
8. Leisure: Freedom for a student from necessities and needs such as hunger, sickness, concerns about shelter, concerns about safety, concerns about future well-being, and so on.

Of course, all these academic freedoms and rights have limitations, rooted in the given history, culture, human biology, economy, and so on where the student is located. The student can choose only what is available for them as the basis of their choice as well as the material for their creative transcendence of the available choices. The student might limit their own freedoms by delegating some of the decision making to their teachers – which is still an exercise in their right to freedom of education. Also, necessities cannot be eliminated, and, at times, necessities can be prioritized over leisure and interfere with the listed freedoms and rights. Still, these academic freedoms and rights must provide aspirational guidelines for education. Let me zoom in on these freedoms and rights.

Curricular academic freedom involves a student's right to pursue his/her own academic interests, questions, inquiries, needs, and passions. These interests, questions, inquiries, needs, and passions may pre-exist in the learner or emerge in an interaction with the teacher, peers, other people, texts, experiences, observations, activities, and so on. For example, in my undergraduate and graduate classes, I provide my students with Curricular Maps (cf. Duberman, 1969). At the beginning of a semester, a Curricular Map involves a big list of topics that I have developed based on my own authorial judgments, on authorial judgments by colleagues teaching similar courses around the world (via their syllabi posted on the Internet), and my past students' interests. During the semester, my current students can and do amend the course's Curricular Map at any time. At the end of each class meeting, my students are engaged in selecting a topic for the next class. Often my students vote on the topics, but at times they want to decide by consensus, or by accepting several topics and splitting the class into smaller groups, or by asking me, their instructor, to make a choice for them, or by flipping a coin on several most popular topics of their choice. Also, students often try to convince their peers to join them in voting for the topic of their choice. Recently, I started experimenting by offering my students a list of themes (i.e., subtopics) within the chosen class topic to begin our discussion, which the students can always amend with their own themes during the class.

The Curricular Map creates an image of the vast, rich, and growing field of study – representation of the rich and inexhaustible learning environment – for the students. This democratic process of selecting topics to study or themes to discuss promotes both students' activism and ownership of their own learning and education. It discursively and powerfully forms their educational desire, "I want to study/learn..." (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017b). This is especially important for education as critical examination and open socialization where the curriculum is always emerging, surprising, and, thus, cannot be preset.

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, it is up to educational authorities to define and mandate curricular topics, themes, and their sequence, disabling students' educational activism, desire, and ownership. The curriculum is imposed on the students. Students do not have a legitimate right to define their curriculum. This is often justified by their ignorance. Their educational desires are tabled until after school is over. Efforts are made to motivate students to engage in the school-imposed curriculum and/or to make the school-imposed curriculum attractive to the students, like, for example, in innovative, progressive education (e.g., Dewey, 1902).

The *instructional* academic freedom involves a student's right to organize their own study in whatever way may fit the student. The teacher truly becomes a teacher when a student asks them for help. Classes, guidance, and learning activities cannot be imposed on the student but only offered and suggested by teachers or initiated by the student. The teacher's pedagogical and academic freedom for and authority of the teacher's authorial pedagogy must be subordinated to the student's freedom and authority and should be based on the student's consent. The student has a right to be the final authority to accept, reject, or modify these guiding offers, suggestions, or invitations by the teacher (Schaefer-Simmern, 1948), which is somewhat similar to the modern patient-doctor and client-lawyer fiduciary relationships. The student must have a right to choose or create their own classes, to choose or invite teachers or peers with whom to study. Like in the case of the Curricular Map, a teacher can develop a list of possible diverse, rich learning activities and projects that the student can choose from, modify, or amend with their own. Guidance cannot be imposed on the student by the teachers (or peers, or institutions) but can only be offered. Of course, the student can ask for guidance.

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, classes, guidance, and learning activities are determined by school authorities and imposed on the students. Students' instructional choices are illegitimate there. This often leads to insensitive guidance that generates resistance in the students to which many teachers reply with oppression or bribing. It also often undermines the students' educational interests, desires, and confidence in their own educational aspirations and abilities.

The *participatory* academic freedom involves a student's right to move freely, in and out, to and from learning activities and educational communities. The student's right of non-participation and disengagement must be respected and valued. The student's non-participation, disengagement, and divorce from activities and communities must be viewed as legitimate and not be punished, as it is often the case in many conventional and even in many innovative schools, except in democratic schools (Rietmulder, 2019). This right creates an opportunity for a self-correcting process in educational practice, where the student can vote with their feet when educational practice or guidance becomes insensitive for their educational (or other) needs or meaningless for them (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016b; Tolstoy, 1967; Tolstoy & Blaisdell, 2000).

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, participation is mandatory and unconditional. Students' non-participation is viewed as illegitimate and punishable. It makes the educational practice insensitive and leaves it without feedback from the primary benefactor of the educational practice – the student him/herself. Conventional education ensures its quality by using the accountability of the preset curricular endpoints. Summative assessments are used to measure how each student far, close, or at the preset curricular endpoints. Sociocultural scholars Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) argue that summative assessments in education create parasitic practices that undermine the trust between the teacher and the student and the educational process itself (Matusov, 2009; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Meacham, 2016). As Bryan Caplan puts it,

I don't hate education. Rather I love education too much to accept our Orwellian substitute. What's Orwellian about the status quo? Most fundamentally, the idea of compulsory enlightenment. Educators routinely defend compulsion on the ground that few students want to explore ideas and culture. They're right about the students' tastes but forget a deeper truth: *intrinsically valuable education requires eager students.* Mandatory study of ideas and culture spoils the journey (Caplan, 2018, p. 352).

The *valuative* academic freedom involves a student's right to define the values, quality, and purpose of their own learning and education. In intrinsic education, the purpose, value, and quality of the educational activity emerge in the activity itself (i.e., "*praxis*" in the Aristotelian terms) and do not pre-exist the educational practice (i.e., "*poiesis*" in the Aristotelian terms) (Carr, 2006). In *praxis*, the initial purpose, value, and quality of this activity are temporary and expected to be changed. An inherent part of intrinsic education itself is the self-defining of the student's educational values, goals, and qualities. The student's realization of the transformation of their educational goals, values, desires, and qualities in education can be called meta-learning. Of course, this practice does not guarantee a good education (good for what and for whom?), but it is open for it.

It is the student, not the teacher, who is the primary and final authority for educational evaluation of the quality of the student's work, setting educational purposes, and defining its educational values. The teacher does not have a right to see the student's work without the student's permission (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, et al., 2016).

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, valuation is exclusively done by the school authority, which increasingly includes private testing companies. Often the quality of education is predefined as all students successfully arriving at curricular endpoints, preset by the society, school authorities, teachers, and testing agencies. The hidden curriculum of such schooling involves students learning how to please this school authority rather than to engage in genuine education.

The *ecological* right for a learner's education involves both the access to diverse, rich, and safe resources, access to sensitive guidance, and the legitimacy to pursue diverse practices, discourses, and values. Thus, for example, at the Latin-American Community Center at Wilmington, Delaware, USA, a computer instructor, Mr. Steve Villanueva, has organized a Lego-Logo club for Latinx children of very diverse ages from 5-year old to 18-year old as a part of their afterschool program (Matusov, 2009, ch. 10). The Club settings involved a computer room with some children playing computer games or engaging in other activities unrelated to the Lego-Logo Club.

Let me provide "a snapshot" of the activities there. In the center of the room, there were big desks with the Lego-Logo blocks and settings for robots designed by the children. Mr. Steve (as he is known in the community) was preparing the children for a national competition. This was an extremely rich and diverse learning environment. Some children were involved exclusively in engineering tasks of the robotics competition, some exclusively in programming the robots, some in in-between tasks, some were interested in the aesthetics of the robots, some were videotaping the work. However, some children were involved in robotics projects outside of the competition promoted by Mr. Steve (e.g., making robot-cars that could "dance" to music, like their favorite Latino wrestler Eddie Guerrero). A few very little children were sitting under the long desks with Lego-Logo settings and playing with small cars that they made out of Lego-Logo blocks. A few teenage girls were discussing romance and pregnancy symptoms. A few young boys were engaged in horse-playing and teasing. One boy who was engaged in an engineering task suddenly said that he was bored and wanted to go to play basketball. Mr. Steve commented that the boy should have left for basketball a half-hour before when his team had left.

The boy left and came back half an hour later. There were many separate, overlapping, and dynamically emerging and shifting discourses. Children moved freely between the various activities and discourses. The learning environment was heterodiscursive, affording very diverse activities and discourses (Matusov, 2011b). Everything was legitimate. At times, Steve or some of the children asked for help from those children who were not engaged in preparation for the competition, but they were free to move back

to their activities after they helped (some did, but some did not). All-in-all, the children loved to come to the Club and could come and work on their activities even when Steve was not with them for whatever reason (Matusov, 2009, ch. 10).

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, the learning environment is either sterile or highly limited, mono-discursive, unsafe, and controlled by the teacher. The students are expected to be on-task or on a few tasks, well defined by the teacher (and if not, the teacher may be punished by the school administration). The tasks and subjects are purified from “contamination” by other discourses, practices, and values (often couched in terms of the moniker “best practice”). In a conventional classroom, a tomato is always a fruit, as defined by in the scientific practice of biology, and never a vegetable as defined by the culinary practice. Students are often punished for making mistakes.

Finally, the educational ecology promoting the right to a student's freedom of education requires resources. My colleague Ana Marjanovic-Shane and I have developed a proposal for providing the universal educational voucher provided directly for all students to ensure the quality of education (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016b).

The *role of academic freedom* involves a student's right to define their own mode of participation in each particular area, educational activity, or topic. It is up to the student to determine their own approaches to their own interests. The student may determine their overall educational goals as, for example, to become recognized by society or by a practice's experts as a competent and capable practitioner through receiving a license or certificate – i.e., to assume a role of a practice-based credential student⁶. In this case, the goal of education for a credential student is to pass some qualifying tests set by the practice's experts. It does not matter how the credential student will prepare for these qualifying tests: alone or with the help of somebody or by going to school. Passing the qualifying tests is the most important thing. Alternatively, a student may want to be a good authorial professional who learns in a community of other professionals as an apprentice. Alternatively, a student may want to engage in a critical dialogue about life, oneself, the world, and society. All these and other possibilities for students' roles in education must be available and legitimate. Also, there should be a possibility for a student to combine or shift between and among these roles.

In contrast, in many conventional and some innovative schools, the legitimate role of the student is single and predefined by the school authorities mostly (but not always!) involving the role of a school-based credential student, who successfully jumps through all the hoops that the school sets for the students.

The *paradigm freedom* involves a student's legitimate choice of educational paradigm, their mixture, or dynamic moving among them. A student can freely decide to engage in critical examination, open socialization, closed socialization, or training (with or without an educator).

In conventional schools, the educational paradigm of training is hegemonic.

Leisure academic freedom is based on the idea that education is a form of genuine leisure. The word “school” (σχολείο) in Greek means leisure (σχολή), a particular type of leisure – time that one can dedicate to examination oneself, of others, and of the world. The Greek notion of school does not seem institutional, as it is now, but rather it is a form of the human condition – namely a special type of leisure (Arendt, 1958) among other types of leisure like: intrinsic play, passionate endeavors, and hanging out

⁶ This is competence credentialism and not educational credentialism.

conversations among friends (Matusov, 2020b, chapter 5). Institutions can assess this condition when needed but should not shape it.

In contrast, conventional and many innovative schools colonize the students with assignments – the traditional necessity of work for children is replaced with the necessity to fulfill schools' assignments in and out of the classrooms. This makes education another chore rather than a type of leisure, which is especially can be important for education as critical examination and open creative socialization.

An educator has the fiduciary duty of their primary loyalty to their students (Rumel, 2013). The educator's fiduciary duty is to assist the students to author their own education. This involves providing a safe learning environment for students when the students are not punished for their mistakes. It involves the freedom from impositions – still, a teacher can legitimately make suggestions, expose the students to alternative ideas and activities, challenge the students' dear ideas and beliefs (at the students' consent), provide guidance welcomed by the students, and so on. An educator essentially becomes a genuine teacher, rather than a nominal "teacher" appointed by some authority, only when a student asks them for help.

Rebukes to objections to the students' right to freedom of education

Here I try to consider and rebuke three major known objections to the students' right to freedom of education. The first objection comes from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who insisted that education is required for the realization of human dignity and, thus, it must be forced on "immature" people – i.e., children and ignorant adults – who are not ready to make this choice on their own. The second objection involves the argument that a student's freedom of education unavoidably involves the "blind leads blind" situation (Jones, 1971, p. 293). The third objection is that without education being forced, most people and especially young children won't engage in education at all, which will lead to the collapse of modern society. Of course, these are not the only possible objections to freedom of education (e.g., possible self-segregation of education). Consideration of the other objections is outside of the scope of this paper.

Kant's paradox of autonomy and paternalism in education

Objection

In his defense and promotion of the Enlightenment's focus on the rational autonomy as the final human dignity, Kant articulated a paradox of autonomy and paternalism in education (LaVaque-Manty, 2006; von Duyke, 2013). Kant empirically noticed that people's rational autonomy is often suppressed by external and internal forces. The external forces of political oppression must be remedied by political means. The internal forces of people's "self-incurred tutelage" (Kant, 1784) – their ignorance and lack of rationality, defined as universal objective reasoning⁷, ("immaturity" in Kant's term) – must be cured by education. Kant saw the purpose of education in fostering the autonomous agency of a student by making the student informed and rational⁸. Since people, especially children, are often "immature," ignorant and non-rational people cannot be left to their own devices to decide their education. Education must be compulsory – i.e., forced, foisted – along with its curriculum and instruction guided by pedagogically wise teachers. Paraphrasing the famous rhetorical question by Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, "If we do not allow free thinking in chemistry or biology, why should we allow it in education?" (cf. "research-based education"). Teachers and society in their wisdom and scientific advances define and impose the curricular

⁷ Universal objective reasoning leads to the objective truth, existing out-there, independent of the human particular subjectivity.

⁸ Kant's education is *instrumental* to serve autonomy rather than *intrinsic* having its worth in itself (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019).

content on the students and make sure that the students would arrive at the correct endpoint tested by the universal objective reasoning mediated by exam agencies.

However, according to Kant, education must be based on students' freedom of reason. Teachers must encourage and legitimize the students' use of their own reason, however imperfect it might be, and engage the students in collective and dialogic testing of their imperfect reasoning, which under the guidance of the skillful and intellectually honest teachers will predictably lead the students to the correct rational conclusion⁹. The authoritarian imposition of knowledge, common to Kant's paradigm and many modern schools, is not legitimate. Having the freedom of reason, students do not have freedom from reason (except in religious education), according to Kant. One of the major by-products of this guidance is the growing rationality of the students, which is the basis of their future autonomy.

Kant's paradox is that students' autonomy is fostered through educational paternalism by denying the students' autonomy in education (except the students' freedom to use of their imperfect reason, consequently guided and corrected by the teacher). Educational paternalism is the pathway to rational autonomy. Kant's philosophical follower Fichte articulated it in the following way,

Education, says Fichte quite consistently, works in such a way that "You will later recognise the reasons for what I am doing now." Children cannot be expected to understand why they are compelled to go to school, nor the uneducated – i.e., the majority of mankind – why they are made to obey laws which will presently make them rational and so retrospectively justify such coercion as they may have suffered. This is the task for the State. "Compulsion is also a kind of education." ... If you ... do not understand your own interests as a rational being, I cannot be expected to consult you or abide by your wishes in the course of making you a rational being. ... I force you to be protected against smallpox though you may not wish it (Berlin & Hardy, 2002, electronic edition).

My reply

British philosopher Isaiah Berlin criticized philosophical monism as the possibility to harmoniously unite all human virtues and values. In Kant's case, this harmonious unity of monism involves rational autonomy (Biesta, 2007). Berlin argued for the radical pluralism of values and virtues that cannot be fully known and united harmoniously in principle,

Berlin believes that precisely because monistic visions of reality answer fundamental human needs, a truly consistent pluralism has been a comparatively rare historical phenomenon. Pluralism, in the sense in which he uses the word, is not to be confused with that which is commonly defined as a liberal outlook-according to which all extreme positions are distortions of true values and the key to social harmony and a moral life lies in moderation and the golden mean. True pluralism, as Berlin understands it, is much more tough-minded and intellectually bold: it rejects the view that all conflicts of values can be finally resolved by synthesis and that all desirable goals may be reconciled. It recognises that human nature is such that it generates values which, though equally sacred, equally ultimate, exclude one another, without there being any possibility of establishing an objective hierarchical relation between them. Moral conduct therefore may involve making agonising choices, without the help of universal criteria, between incompatible but equally desirable values (Kelly, 1978, p. xv).

⁹ In this sense, Kant's position fits progressive education (LaVaque-Manty, 2006; Matusov, 2020, submitted).

According to Berlin, human dignity is an unfinalizable, conflicting, and open-ended project, with the rational autonomy being one of its possible virtues. The pathways to these other virtues may or may not lay in the universal objective rationalism and Kantian' reason-based education.

The Kantian universal objective rationalism robs humans from their autonomy and dignity by making them robots of the natural laws. A Kantian rational person must discipline themselves to slavishly obey the natural laws of the necessity, existing out-there, independently of human consciousness. Kantian autonomy – freedom to reason by themselves and in dialogue with other people – is an essentially transient and limited process to discover or learn an unknown natural law or fact of the necessity. When the law is discovered and learned, discipline must prevail (Matusov, 2015a). Kant quotes a claim attributed to Enlightened Prussian monarch Frederick the Great, “Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!” (Kant, 1784). This enlightened authoritarianism can be applied to Kant's universal objective rationality. The despotism of aristocracy, tradition, religious dogma and personal prejudice is replaced with the despotism of the natural laws, including the historical laws of the societal development (cf. Hegel, Saint-Simon, Marx). The more natural laws and facts we discover, the more slavish out behavior must be.

There is no doubt that the Kantian virtue of knowing (always imperfectly) the natural laws and facts of the necessity and subordinating to these laws is important. However, as Berlin argued, there many other virtues that can be more important at times, which might be in conflict with Kantian virtue. For example, it may be mathematically true that sacrificing the life of one person is better to save the lives of three people. This mathematical formula is in accordance with the Kantian ethics of his categorical imperative, a moral law that is unconditional or absolute for all agents, time, and place, the validity or claim of which does not depend on any ulterior motive or end. However, it may not be true from a moral point of view (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). According to Bakhtin, who criticized Kant, any moral formula is an oxymoron. Moral can be only a human unique personal deed, embedded in a dialogue that challenges this deed and demands responses from the person (i.e., responsibility) (Bakhtin, 1993). Combining Bakhtin's and Berlin's philosophical frameworks, this responsible human deed addresses the “agonizing choices” of the unfinalizable pluralism of human values in the contested open-ended project of defining human dignity.

Also, there is a contested plurality of rationality itself in addition to the contested plurality of values, argued by Berlin. In addition to the Kantian universal, objective, positivist, self-contained rationality, there are context- and practice-bound diverse rationalities (e.g., “agonistic rationality,” “critical ontological rationality,” see Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015). For example, according to universal objective rationality, the concept of “brother” is always relational – there cannot be just one brother (Piaget, 1985). However, from the relational human rationality, a brother can denounce his brother because of his unbrotherly deed of betrayal, as it portrayed in the movie “The Godfather II” (Matusov & Hayes, 2000). In contrast to the universal objective rationality, the context-bounded rationalities are often contested and cannot necessarily be established through a consensus. Finally, some scholars view rationality essentially as a social, discursive property rather than individual – e.g., as a person's participation in an “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1991), where the “internal” is referred to the discourse and not necessarily to the individual (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010).

Similarly, the notion of autonomy becomes contested from within and from outside. From outside, autonomy has been challenged as being the only or even primary value defining human dignity, as I discussed above. From within, the concept of autonomy is diversified and contested by diverse versions of rationality, also discussed above. Kant himself seemed to discuss different versions of autonomy: capricious immature autonomy, autonomy colonized by cultural and communal prejudices, uninformed

autonomy, and rational informed autonomy, which he valued the most. In addition, in contrast to Kant's version of *rational* autonomy, autonomy can be based on *responsibility* as a person's commitment to addressing the challenges of their deeds and ideas by others and the self (cf. Bakhtin, 1993). In addition, a person seeking help can be viewed as a manifestation of dependency, in some versions of autonomy, or as autonomy, in others. There are also known cultural versions of autonomy (Rogoff, 2003). For example, there are cultural differences in how the members of Marquesan indigenous communities and the Westerners view autonomy, "Western concepts of autonomy stress the freedom of the person to pursue individual goals unencumbered by social obligations... Marquesans view mature adults not as those who give up personal goals... to conform to the group, but rather those who coordinate their own goals with those of the group" (Martini, 1994, pp. 73, 101).

Unfinalizable contested pluralism of values, rationalities, autonomy, and definitions of human dignity undermine Kant's call for the educational paternalism. Human dignity is not a well-defined known destination, but rather an open-ended contested project, tasked to humanity and to each individual person. Education may or may not be a pathway to the realization of this human dignity project. Besides, education is not reduced to the students acquiring the universal objective rationality. Instead, education is itself bounded by the unfinalizable contested pluralism of values, rationalities, and definitions of human dignity. In fact, this radical pluralism, affirmed by Berlin, is the philosophical basis for a student's right to freedom of education. This principle of freedom of education was articulated by the founder of the first democratic school, called Summerhill, A. S. Neill, "Freedom, like peace, is indivisible. It means that **you should never influence the choices children make**. It's all or nothing. If trust in a child is not absolute, the principle of Summerhill, the principle of free choice, loses all value¹⁰." This principle of freedom of education is not limited by a student's age or disability.

Radical pluralism severely undermines the Kant-Fichte paternalistic arguments that "Compulsion is also a kind of education" and that forced education is akin to forced vaccination against a deadly communicable disease. "Compulsory education is a contradiction in terms, a central miscalculation about the nature of learning... in education as in love, compulsion destroys the pleasure and the inherent rewards" (Jerome, 1970, pp. 107, 108). Practices require competence and mastery, not (compulsory) education (Caplan, 2018). It is true that education can be a powerful pathway¹¹ to a practice' competence. However, it is up to a person to choose this pathway, if the person desires the entry to the practice. Kant's thesis for freedom of reason in education must be extended to freedom of a diversity of reasons – not only reasons bounded by the universal, objective, positivist rationality, – to freedom of non-reason (e.g., intuition, creativity), to freedom of curriculum choice (what for the student to study), and so on. Neither the teacher nor society can predict what is needed for the student's future in our civilization with rapidly accelerating technological and social changes. Education on-demand becomes a more and more attractive alternative to education as the preparation for the imaginary future (Collins & Halverson, 2009).

The paradox of ignorance and learning

Objection

But, is it the "blind leads blind" situation? When a student has the freedom to define their education, curriculum, instruction, assessment, etc., is it not a "blind" student-as-educator leads a "blind" student-as-learner? How can an ignorant student participate in designing a good curriculum for themselves, if the student is not familiar with the academic matter, they want to study? Is it not a primary, if not solely, the role

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o58xTHGYzIY>

¹¹ An alternative pathway to a practice's competence is being thrown in the practice by themselves and/or others – swim or sink. The latter pathway was undertaken by such famous people like physicist Michael Faraday, inventor Thomas Edison, computer gurus and college dropouts Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, among many others.

of the teacher, who is considered to be very knowledgeable in this academic field and in pedagogy, and who, thus, knows better what and how the students must learn?

My reply

This is how I address this paradox in my past Open Curriculum Syllabus, where my students have a right to choose a curricular topic for their next class. I develop a list of possible curricular topics, which I call the "Curricular map" (Matusov, 2015b; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017a). This list involves topics that I personally and professionally and my colleagues around the world teaching similar classes feel important in the studied field to learn, choices added by the past students, and new choices that my current students add. I wrote in one of my syllabi,

This is a tough question, which, in my view, reflects one of the main paradoxes of learning, namely: On the one hand, a student does not know what to learn because the student is not familiar with the subject of their own learning. But on the other hand, learning is a transformation of the student's subjectivity: their opinions, thoughts, feelings, worldviews, interests, puzzlement, and concerns. Without a student actively raising a question important for the student, their teacher's answer usually remains meaningless for the student. Thus, meaningful guidance by the teacher starts with the student's question.

To address this learning paradox, I propose we constantly negotiate what we will learn to reflect your emerging questions, puzzlements, concerns, and interests. It is like going to an unfamiliar foreign country: the guide's suggestions and the tourists' emerging interests generate meaningful, safe, and exciting tourist experiences and learning. The more tourists become familiar with the foreign country, the more informed becomes their interests. Similarly, I hope that the more you become familiar with the vast terrain of the field, the more informed you will become your interests and choices of the study.

I already asked you to reply to my Curricular Survey, based on the Curriculum Map, about your familiarity and interest in curricular topics of the class. The results of the Curricular Survey show, you already have certain interests and attractions, and also you have certain indifferences and even curricular repellences. Some of these indifferences and repellences may be caused by your lack of familiarity or poor learning experiences with these subjects, but some can be a result of your informed choice or inclination. There is also a potential effect of the serendipity of getting attracted (or repelled) to something that you did not care before or were not even aware of. As your views and interests may change during the course, we can travel in different territories of the curricular terrain. At the end of each class meeting, we will make a decision about what to study next. I'll try to plan one week ahead.

Of course, this is just one approach to address the paradox of ignorance and learning. An alternative approach for a student is to start studying something of their interest and see where it leads the student. Both autodidact and assisted education have their own ways to address this paradox.

Will people engage in education on their own desire without being foisted?

Objection

Most children and people, in general, won't engage in their own education unless being forced on them. Although education might be the primary preoccupation of students, society and the state also have a strong interest in education. The economy needs an educated workforce. Skillful participation in modern institutions needs educated clientele. Democracy and politics need educated citizens. Military needs educated soldiers. As one of my undergraduate teacher education students said, without being foisted, she would spend all her day in her bed. Young children will spend all day playing games. Most adults who may

need education will spend all their days engaging in idleness or entertainment. Without foisted education, modern society will collapse.

My reply

I see the following three issues in this objection: 1) instrumental education, 2) intrinsic education, and 3) young children. **Instrumental education**, aiming at primarily some educational outcomes, is often forced on people by the necessities. People, including very young people, either want or need to engage in certain immediate or future practices, which requires competence from them. Sometimes they are faced with obstacles that they need to overcome. Sometimes they need to solve interpersonal problems, and so on. Education is a powerful *means* to address these needs; that is why I call this education “instrumental.” The focus of instrumental education is on outcomes: competence, overcoming obstacles, solving problems, and so on. This type of instrumental education is often forced on people by the described necessities. However, this “personal” self-coercion by the necessities is different from the “social” coercion by teachers, state, and society, common to many schools. It is because the “personal” coercion by the necessities perceived by a student involves the *rooted* motivation, described above. In the “personal” self-coercion, **education is a response to the person's own desires to overcome the experienced current or imagined future necessities.** In the “social” coercion, education is a societal calculation of what might be needed from the student in the future. A societal calculation of education is arguably much more imprecise and wasteful than a personal desire of learning. Also, a student's self-disciplined study on a personal demand is more efficient than a student's study foisted by the teacher (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Sidorkin, 2002, 2009). For example, in the UK democratic school Summerhill, a student had chosen not to attend classes on reading and writing – he graduated from the school being able barely to read but not to write. He was forced to learn reading and writing as a young adult, spending a few months on that. Eventually, he achieved an advanced degree in environmental studies. Later, in his reflection as a mature person, this man claimed that he learned in Summerhill the most important lesson of self-directed learning on his own demand (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o58xTHGYzIY>). In sum, voluntary instrumental education is enforced by the student-perceived necessities and, thus, guaranteed.

What about intrinsic education, which involves education for education's sake – will people voluntary involve in such education? Is it true that only a small elite of people, with some kind of “advanced” brains, would desire and capable of intrinsic education? Do most people really desire only instrumental education to get good jobs, improve their socioeconomic status, make society better, promote patriotism, and so on?

To test this inquiry, my colleagues and I conducted a study in three countries – the US, Russia, and Brazil – with 58 participants of different ages, with a diverse educational and vocational background. We called this study “The Magic Learning Pill.” In this study, we ask our research participants if they would take an imaginary Magic Learning Pill (MLP), would-be designed by scientists, instead of going through with their education, if the result of taking the Pill would be “the same,” if not better, than the result of the best education. We asked them to envision areas of their past education for which they might take the Magic Learning Pill, if at all, and for which they might not, if not at all, and why. Our results show that almost all participants experienced and valued both instrumental education of taking MLP for some of their important learning and intrinsic education of rejecting MLP for some other important learning of theirs (Matusov, Baker, Fan, Choi, & Hampel, 2017). Intrinsic education is less valued by modern society because it is a form of leisure, which often is viewed as frivolous in our necessities-based civilization (Matusov, 2020b). In addition, intrinsic education for creativity and critical examination often undermines the societal stability and challenges the existing power hierarchies. In sum, at least one empirical study shows that intrinsic education is valued and demanded by people when there is a lesser societal pressure to force it

on everybody. Still, it remains an empirical question of whether most people would engage in intrinsic education, given a choice of leisure.

The accumulated evidence and experiences of the existing democratic schools for about last 100 years have shown that, indeed, when they have a choice, a high majority of young, elementary school age, children prefer playing over voluntary attendance of classes (Greenberg, 1991; Neill, 1960; Rietmulder, 2019). However, democratic educators also report young children learning to read and write through play and through learning with peers. Also, the overwhelming majority of the democratic school graduates attend universities and colleges, disproportionately high to their national demographics (Rietmulder & The Circle School, 2015). Again, this suggests that although children may choose education as a recognizable activity in itself, later than it is now forced on them by others, self-chosen, self-directed education is much more efficient than foisted education with the imposed curriculum. Of course, one might object that the evidence above is coming from a self-selected population of the students of families interested in self-directed education. More research is probably needed. In sum, although it may be true that given a choice, many young children might choose to play over education, it might not be consequential for society in the long run because self-chosen and self-directed education is more efficient than compulsory and foisted education.

Limitations of a student's right to freedom education

Like anything in life, a student's right to freedom of education has its own legitimate limitations. These limitations are often contested and often have blurry boundaries. In other words, people may disagree on whether a particular limitation of the right is legitimate or how far this limitation must go. For example, consider safety as a limitation of freedom of education. Some parents let young children to explore their neighborhood or climb high on a tall tree, while some do not (Skenazy, 2009). It is a matter of judgment. However, most people would probably agree to object to a student's experiential, trial-and-error, education of tasting unfamiliar mushrooms or touching unfamiliar snakes to distinguish the poisonous ones from non-poisonous.

Education for crime is probably another type of legitimate limitation. I reported a case when I was a physics schoolteacher in the USSR. A middle-school student of mine suggested me to teach him "mechanics" of robbing newspaper kiosks and making flying knives. I refused to provide him with this education (Matusov, 2020, submitted). Like in any fiduciary professions – e.g., legal, medical, educational, – there are legal limits of the practitioners' help and servitude to their clients, patients, and students. The concerns about safety, legality, and morality of the students' actions and demands on the educators my legitimately limit the fiduciary duty of the educators.

Limited resources for education represent another interesting case of possible legitimate limitations of the right to freedom of education. Thus, a person, inspired to learn to pilot an intergalactic spacecraft, might be out of luck because our civilization has not developed this technology yet. In a less dramatic example, access to learning a particular available practice or educational resources (e.g., computers or access to the Internet) might be limited or even absent for a particular student. This limitation can be historical, local, social, economic, and political. Poverty can severely limit the right to freedom of education. But, is poverty a *legitimate* limit, historically or universally?

What makes a limitation of the right legitimate or illegitimate? One possible outlook on the legitimacy of a limitation of the right to freedom of education is moral. From a moral perspective, poverty, as a form of injustice, is an illegitimate limitation. From a legal perspective, however undesirable, poverty is legal and, thus, legitimate in most modern societies. From an economic perspective, depending on a

particular economic doctrine, poverty might be seen as unavoidable (and again legitimate), at least, in the current historical time. The economic perspective becomes even more salient when the division of labor is considered for its legitimacy of a limitation of the right. As it is now, for our society, someone still needs to deliver pizza, work on assembly lines, and take garbage from the streets – jobs that might be replaced by smart machines in the future¹². Students' educational aspirations can be crushed by a lack of available jobs that might fit these aspirations. The historical situation with poverty, division of labor, types of available jobs (e.g., mechanical, non-creative, repetitive), or even having jobs as such may change with the advance of the global technological unemployment that might become a blessing rather than a curse for the right to freedom of education (Markoff, 2015). When the economy starts requiring fewer and fewer people for production and services, the conditions might be created for a leisure-based society, in which education can become a form of leisure (Matusov, 2020b).

A path to a student's right to freedom of education

There are radical and gradual approaches to promoting the right to freedom of education. There are small oases where the right to freedom of education has been *radically* realized. I am talking about democratic schools like Summerhill in the UK (Neill, 1960), Sudbury Valley School in the USA (Greenberg, 1991), The Circle School in the USA (Rietmulder, 2019), and so on. Due to the national laws governing educational institutions, most of the democratic schools are located in the USA. Democratic schools are characterized by the absence of foisted education and imposed curriculum. Students have the right to not engage in education and, when they engage, to choose their own curriculum¹³ (Rietmulder, 2019). Another form of organized education is homeschooling, although it is much more diverse than the democratic school movement. Some few homeschooling respect the students' right to freedom of education (Llewellyn, 1998), but many more do not. At the higher education level, there have been some pedagogical experiments in democratic education that promote the full or limited right to freedom of education (Duberman, 1969, 2009; Gates, 2020, in press; Matusov, 2015b, 2020a; Phillips, 2002; Shor, 1996; Tompkins, 1996). There have been historical precedents of respecting the students' right to freedom of education: Socrates' circles, Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Peripatetics, and Southern European medieval universities (Cobban, 1980).

Gradual approaches to the right to freedom of education involve opening up some limited areas of institutionalized education for the students' choices and freedoms. Many educational institutions may have a limited right for the students to practice their freedom of education. The most limited right is probably freedom of participation in education, especially for young children. Most K-12 schools are based on compulsory education. Another highly limited right is freedom for the students to decide their curriculum even in higher education. Attendance is another highly limited freedom. Freedom from imposed assignments and assessments is rarely guaranteed, especially in conventional school institutions. Some progressive schools (and individual classrooms), like Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, and so on, provide students with freedom from grading, imposed homework, controlled classroom movements, and so on. They allow more curricular, instructional, and organizational choices for their students. Some conventional schools and classrooms include open-ended imposed assignments, which grants some freedom of expression to the students. Some innovative teachers try to provide a safe learning environment that encourages the students to express their opinions and views in the classroom without repercussion when their views turn to be erroneous or unpopular.

¹² Elsewhere, I argue that humans were first "smart machines" (Matusov, 2020b).

¹³ In personal communication, Jim Rietmulder argued that democratic schools are not completely "free-range" education, because although they have more freedom for education, they are still "caged" by the national laws of compulsory education and some oppressive restrictions. In addition, I argue that democratic schools often do not have students' freedom from leisure.

On the bigger picture, in my judgment, the main obstacle for the right to freedom of education is the enmeshment of education with other non-educational practices and goals like educational credentialism aiming primarily at social mobility, keeping young children from streets and jobs, fighting against poverty (school lunches), promoting social justice, instilling nationalism and patriotism, social cohesion, cultural homogenization, assimilation of immigrants, economic social engineering, childcare, social or political conformism, democratic participation, instilling moral values, need-based educational assistance, and so on. Disentanglement education from these important needs might help to recognize that education is the business of the student and, thus, to promote the student's right to freedom of education. I believe that this disentanglement will become possible when education as intrinsic value, rather than only instrumental, will become appreciated in our society (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019). In its own turn, the appreciation of intrinsic education occurs when our civilization transitions from the exclusively necessity-based to a leisure-dominated hybrid (Matusov, 2020b).

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Appendix I

Dear Eugene,

I take the freedom of writing this as a quick letter. I want to honor my engagement while realizing that this type of conversations is far away from my nature. My sincere apologies for not being able to go deeper.

I am precisizing that my comments are not to be published and are only a contribution from me to you.

Analysis:

Freedom for students. Yes or not seems to be **the duality in which you inscribe your argument**. But is their such thing as duality in freedom?

Explained in different context, presented from different perspectives, freedom for student is the leitmotiv that is argued all over this article. However, sometimes I feel that what is happening here is not a conversation on freedom but rather a conversation that uses freedom as a subject. **Freedom is perverted to the exercise of mental activity. In that sense, I feel that I, as an engaged reader, am taken into a spinning circle that does not lead me anywhere especially not to the freedom for student.**

Sometimes, it feels that I am reading a paper advocating for **humanist freedom**, and then I realize that I am reading a libertarian paper calling individualism and isolation "freedom". These oppositions in perspectives presented in the same place and given the same importance make the article confusing. **Where do you locate yourself and why for? I wonder all the way where you wish to go.**

I understand the statement "Student must be free to choose their education". Seems pretty **altruist**. Why are they student at the very beginning? Also, I have been a teacher for around 20 years. I taught students

of all ages. They are all different, all have different ambitions; however, we also find commonalities. There is no such thing as a "student" entity. All ages are different, all people are different, all stories are different, while at the same time being all the same. How can we then say: "Student must be free to choose their education" What student, when? Where? With whom and How? We think generally and we advocate for individuality?

Shall teachers forget all forms of personal agency in order to leave room for students' experiences? If students are the "masters in their domains" why aren't they teachers then? Are parents needed in the development of a child? Maybe we could replace parents by machines that sustain the life of children until they are capable of being self-sustainable?

Altogether, I think that these arguments are trying to define in a very static and reductionist way a concept that is evolving and transforming. Education is an experience. Using static rationality to talk about education experience is a mistake commonly made. It reduces education to the accumulation of knowledge and a list of achievable outcomes. Freedom itself is not static and cannot be define using a list of arguments as discursive as they can be. Freedom as much as Education are relational experiences. I leave it to each and every one to find ways to share his-her experience in education to create his-her understanding of freedom and-or education.

With my respect,

Si Belkacem TAIEB

Appendix II

Hi Eugene,

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. This is Matthew Shumski (a member of the Self-Directed Education, SDE, research group). I hope you are well.

"A Students Right to Freedom of Education" is a fantastic paper. It prompted deep thought and I really enjoyed reading it. A couple of thoughts came to mind that I wanted to ask:

1. Something I have been thinking about a lot is the degree of appropriate freedom and direction in education for a student with dyslexia. In my experience, most unschooled and SDE children learn to read, but I have known a couple who have dyslexia and did not receive support at a young age. What are your thoughts on this? How should freedom in edu be negotiated with potential disabilities and/or trauma? I know you mentioned this briefly in the meeting, and I would love to know your thoughts.

2. How should freedom of edu in closed socialization be squared with an individual who opts out of the well defined normative practice when the practice relates to safety concerns (i.e. refusing to social distance during COVID, etc.)? Maybe this falls under the limitation of illegal activity that you mention at the end. Is there a suitable approach to mitigate a refusal through directed education?

3. To what extent is it possible to disentangle education with welfare and safety programs when these things permit leisure, which in turn permits education? What is the most effective way to parse them out when they seem inherently intertwined? The COVID shut down has me thinking and writing about this.

4. Is there a paper and/or article to learn more about the Bakhtinian Dialogic approach and practical application? I am really interested in this topic and using it. Admittedly, I have not read much about it; a general overview read would be really helpful.

Thank you again. I really appreciate your work and the opportunities you create through the SDE research group. Although I have not joined as much as I'd like to (I plan to join more now that my work has been rescheduled), it teaches me a lot and inspires great ideas for my graduate work.

In kindness and gratitude,

Matthew Shumski



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