

Paternalism and the Justification of Education

Johannes Giesinger

Volume 26, numéro 1, 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071420ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071420ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

ISSN

2369-8659 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Giesinger, J. (2019). Paternalism and the Justification of Education.
Philosophical Inquiry in Education, 26(1), 49–63.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1071420ar>

Résumé de l'article

The problem of paternalism, widely discussed in moral and political philosophy, has not received much attention in the philosophy of education. Yet Johannes Drerup claims that paternalism should be considered 'an indigenous concept' of educational theory, and 'the indigenous model of justification' in education. This essay explores Drerup's claim, considering conceptual and normative aspects of paternalism and education. The first idea put forward in this essay is that, in the search for 'indigenous' educational concepts, we should focus on education, not paternalism. In a second step, however, this essay makes clear that the debate on paternalism might inspire conceptual and normative discussions in the philosophy of education. In this vein, a core notion of educational practice (as educational address in asymmetric constellations) is sketched, and it is outlined what it means to justify education. The idea is that certain forms of educational address require a specific form of (quasi-paternalistic) justification that goes beyond the justification of educational aims.

Paternalism and the Justification of Education

JOHANNES GIESINGER

University of Zürich

The problem of paternalism, widely discussed in moral and political philosophy, has not received much attention in the philosophy of education. Yet Johannes Drerup claims that paternalism should be considered ‘an indigenous concept’ of educational theory, and ‘the indigenous model of justification’ in education. This essay explores Drerup’s claim, considering conceptual and normative aspects of paternalism and education. The first idea put forward in this essay is that, in the search for ‘indigenous’ educational concepts, we should focus on education, not paternalism. In a second step, however, this essay makes clear that the debate on paternalism might inspire conceptual and normative discussions in the philosophy of education. In this vein, a core notion of educational practice (as educational address in asymmetric constellations) is sketched, and it is outlined what it means to justify education. The idea is that certain forms of educational address require a specific form of (quasi-paternalistic) justification that goes beyond the justification of educational aims.

In a recent essay, Johannes Drerup claims that ‘paternalism should [...] be regarded as an “indigenous concept” (Herbart) of educational theory’ and as the “indigenous model of justification” that underlines the formal structure of educational practices’ (Drerup 2015, p. 65). Drerup refers to Johann Friedrich Herbart’s idea that educational theory should strive to develop genuinely educational concepts: concepts that ‘have their home’ in the sphere of education.¹

In historical terms, ‘paternalism’ does not have its home in the sphere of education. The concept, etymologically, refers to the *pater* (father) and, in this way, indirectly, to family education. This does not mean, however, that the debate on paternalism is especially concerned with the paternalistic or educational acts of fathers or parents. Rather, reference to the role of parents is made in a comparative or metaphorical way. Certain forms of political and legal intervention are criticised as ‘parent-like’. It is argued that paternalistic legislation treats citizens like children (Feinberg 1971; Conly 2013; Benporath 2010; Marneffe, 2006). Paternalism is thus a term used by liberal anti-paternalists to oppose certain forms of state policies, namely those that restrict persons’ agency with the aim of promoting these persons’ interests.

¹ The German term used by Herbart is *einheimisch*, which Drerup translates as ‘indigenous’. Herbart’s call for *einheimische Begriffe* (indigenous concepts) has resonated widely in the German tradition of educational theory. Note that Drerup elaborates on the issue in a recent essay in German (Drerup 2016). He also addresses the question of paternalism and education in an earlier book (Drerup 2013).

Although paternalism was not originally coined as an educational term, it might nevertheless be considered as educationally relevant: as a ‘model of justification’ for educational practices, to use Drerup’s formulation. For education to be justified in paternalistic terms, however, it would itself have to be conceived of as a form of paternalism. While some aspects of education, such as compelling children to go to school, might satisfy this condition (Schouten 2018, p. 337), it is not at all clear that education, in its core conceptual elements, is best understood as paternalistic.²

In this essay, I question Drerup’s claim that the concept of paternalism should be situated at the heart of educational discourse. I argue that instead of relying on the justificatory models developed in the debate on paternalism, we should look at education directly, and develop a model of justification that is specifically educational. At the same time, however, I try to show that considering the problem of paternalism helps to identify an important justificatory issue in the sphere of education: educational practices that attempt to shape and control person’s behaviour and development require a specific form of (‘quasi-paternalistic’) justification. The justification of education, I claim, cannot be reduced to an argument for the value of ‘being educated’ (Cuypers 2012; Peters 2010).

In the first two sections of this essay, I consider conceptual and normative issues of ‘paternalism’ and ‘education’, before I focus on ‘education’, in the third section. An educational model of justification, I assume, must be based on a conceptual account of educational practice. I propose an approach that highlights the notion of educational address (in asymmetric constellations). The idea is that some forms of educational address—but not all—require a form of justification that has similarities to paternalistic rationales. In concentrating on ‘education’ and ‘educational address’—as indigenous educational concepts—we do not need a clear-cut view as to how exactly the concept of paternalism applies to education, but we can nevertheless benefit from the discursive framework developed in the debate on paternalism.

Paternalism and Education – Conceptual Issues

According to the standard conceptual view of paternalism, an act is paternalistic if: 1) it interferes with another person’s agency (liberty, or autonomy) and 2) that interference is done in order to promote or protect that person’s interests (welfare, or good). Call the first feature the *interference condition*, and the second the *benevolence condition*.³

While there will be wide-spread agreement that some aspects of educational practice can be characterized as paternalistic, it is not clear that we should conceive of ‘education’ in analogy to ‘paternalism’. R.S. Peters (1966), for instance, defines ‘education’ as a valuable state of mind. The ‘educated person’, in his view, has knowledge, understanding, and a ‘cognitive perspective’ (Peters, 1966). Here, ‘education’

² It is not clear under which conditions a concept is to be seen as ‘indigenous’ to education. If the concept of paternalism only refers to some aspects of educational practice, it might nevertheless to be **considered as** an ‘educational’ concept. However, conceiving of paternalism as *the* indigenous model of education entails—in my reading—that education is inherently paternalistic. Education might then be justified as a form of paternalism.

³ A conceptual account along these lines is provided by Gerald Dworkin (1972). The terms ‘interference condition’ and ‘benevolence condition’ are used by Drerup (2017).

is contrasted with ‘training’ and resembles the German term *Bildung*. In German, however, the concept *Bildung* is not only distinguished from *Ausbildung* (training), but also from *Erziehung*. *Erziehung*, as well as *Bildung*, might be translated as ‘education.’ Drerup’s claim regarding the paternalistic character of education mainly refers to education as *Erziehung*; according to a traditional usage of these terms, *Bildung* captures the notion of individual self-realization, while *Erziehung* is used for the acts of the educator who is trying to promote and control the young person’s self-development (Benner 2015; Humboldt 1980). It is here that the concept of paternalism might be brought into play.

But even if we focus on educational practice in the sense of *Erziehung*, the standard conceptual view of paternalism seems to be at odds with some forms or aspects of that practice. First, not all forms of educational acts are directed at the promotion of the child’s own welfare. Consider, for example, moral education. Of course, it might be argued that becoming a moral person is an aspect of the child’s welfare. However, promoting children’s morally relevant traits—motivations, emotions capacities, knowledge—seems justified beyond the fact that having these traits is good for children. We mostly think of morality as something that is relevant or has value regardless of whether it promotes our own good. Similarly, an education for citizenship is not best justified with regards to individuals’ welfare. Just like moral duties, the duties we have as citizens do not lose their significance as soon as they conflict with our personal interests. However, it is possible to accommodate virtually all educational aims that are commonly seen as relevant to the criteria of personal welfare (that is, the benevolence condition of paternalism).

Instead of doing so, we could try to expand the concept of paternalism beyond the benevolence condition. Consider the conceptual account provided by Seana Shiffrin (2000). This account works with the idea that persons must be ascribed a sphere of legitimate control. An act can be characterized as paternalistic, according to Shiffrin, if it affects this individual sphere. As Shiffrin points out, persons do not only have legitimate control over matters concerning their own interests (the benevolence condition), but over other issues as well. This conceptual framework requires that it is further determined which issues belong to the legitimate sphere of individual control.

Does this allow us to characterize moral education as paternalistic, even if morality is not considered as an aspect of the human good? According to the common view, it is not within persons’ own authority to determine whether they want to live morally. Others can make them accountable for moral misbehaviour. It is clear that blaming others morally is not paternalistic. Still, it might be considered whether educating persons for morality could be described as a form of paternalism, within Shiffrin’s framework. According to this view, others can legitimately demand that I act morally but are not entitled to try to shape my moral character. So, an inveterate liar might feel ‘paternalized’ if others use various (educational) means to make him understand that lying is morally bad, or otherwise try to improve his self-control.

Shiffrin’s account might thus be used to characterize moral education as paternalistic. Nevertheless, her conceptual view of paternalism cannot be applied to the education of children; according to Shiffrin, all acts of paternalism are illegitimate because they interfere with persons’ legitimate spheres of control. In other words, if it is justified to educate children (for their own good, for morality, or citizenship), this sort of treatment cannot be characterized as paternalistic, otherwise, it would be unjustified, within Shiffrin’s framework. This problem arises because a normative element—the idea of a legitimate sphere of control—is built into the conceptual account.

Let us now turn to the interference condition. Here, the problem is that education might involve interference with children's agency (e.g., in the form of coercion) but that there are many instances of education that are not appropriately described in this way. There are, for instance, 'negative' or 'indirect' forms of education. Here, the idea is that the educator should not directly interfere in children's agency, but rather arrange the natural and social environment in a way that enables children to engage in 'self-directed' learning. Moreover, 'direct' forms of education are not necessarily coercive. Many types of educational practice might be described as supportive: educators help children to achieve relevant goals. They initiate children into cultural practices with which they were previously not acquainted. In many cases, educational activities do not run contrary to children's wills. Often, they are initiated by the children themselves ('Show me this!' 'I would like to learn that'). Liberal practices of education tend to highlight rational discourse and see the giving and taking of reasons as central to education. It is often assumed that influencing someone's behaviour on the basis of reasons—ones that are accepted by the other—is not paternalistic.

If we want to stick to the claim that education is a form of paternalism, we might look out for a conceptual account of paternalism that does not entail the interference condition. Consider, for instance, Jonathan Quong's conception that an act is paternalistic if it is 'motivated by a negative judgement about' another person's 'ability [...] to make the right decision or manage the particular situation in a way that will effectively advance' the other person's welfare (Quong 2010, p. 80). Similarly, Shiffrin states that it is characteristic of paternalistic acts that the agent considers 'her judgment or agency to be (or as likely to be), in some respect, superior' to the judgement of the other person (Shiffrin 2000, p. 218). We might call this the superiority condition. This idea might be translated into the realm of education; it seems characteristic of educators that they take their own judgement as to what children should learn, and how they should develop, as superior to the judgement of the children themselves. In other words, educational practices rely on the assumption that the learners are not capable (or are less capable than the educators) to organize their own learning processes: to know what and how they should learn, and to motivate and discipline themselves to effectively learn what has to be learned.

It might be argued, then, that the superiority condition, in some version or other, can be applied to education. Should we conclude that education is indeed—as proposed by Drerup—a form of paternalism? Not necessarily. Alternatively, we might say that this condition is a feature of the concept of education, or some possible aspects or usages of this concept. Educators, it seems, are typically motivated by a sense of superiority towards learners.

There is another possible strategy to handle the problem that many instances of educational practice fail to satisfy the interference condition. Drerup (2015; 2017) argues that in thinking about paternalism in education, we should not focus on single acts or types of acts (such as coercion). Rather, we should start from the idea of educational practice as an asymmetrically structured social set-up or 'constellation'. It can then be argued that the educational constellation as a whole is paternalistic, although not every single act within the constellation satisfies the conceptual criteria for paternalism. Consider the example of reasoning with children – an apparently non-paternalistic activity. As embedded within the asymmetrical structure of educational practice, this activity is significantly different from free discourse among adults who stand on equal footing. First, adults and children typically differ with reference to relevant empirical traits (e.g. capacities of reasoning, knowledge and experience); second, the social order of the educational constellation ascribes different roles or 'statuses' to educators and learners. The educators have special responsibilities, but also particular rights towards the learners. This

asymmetrical set-up makes the learners especially prone to let their views or values be influenced by the educator, although there is also room for resistance and disobedience.

In this way, then, education might be characterized as a form of paternalism. But again, the question is: why should we accommodate education to paternalism? The insight that education is typically tied to asymmetrical social arrangements is an insight about the practice of education, not paternalism. The focus of educational theory should be on education. However, considering education as ‘quasi-paternalistic’ might help us to see certain conceptual and normative features of educational practice that are otherwise overlooked. In what follows, I look more closely at the justificatory structures developed in the debate on paternalism, and ask whether these normative features might be used in the justification of educational practices.

Paternalism and Education – Normative Issues

As indicated in the introduction, the debate on paternalism was started by an anti-paternalistic impulse. It was argued that it is wrong to treat adults as children. Philosophically, the core problem, then, was to justify why adults are not legitimately paternalized. There are two main models of justification. The first—I call it the ‘welfarist’-model is based on the general idea that there is a duty to promote or protect persons’ welfare or interests. The second—‘respect-based’-model is grounded on the assumption that there is a duty to respect persons in their autonomy.

The welfarist model, it seems, can easily be used to justify paternalistic acts, as these are per definition directed at the promotion of welfare. If it is in the interests of persons to be constrained in their agency, why should we refrain from it? However, it is also possible to ground an anti-paternalist position on welfarism: It might be assumed that individuals are in a better position than others (or the state) to judge what is good for them (Mill, 1956). If this is correct, paternalism is likely to undermine persons’ welfare. Recent defenders of paternalism towards adults have argued, however, that this assumption should be reconsidered: Sarah Conly, for instance, describes adults as ‘intractably irrational’ (Conly 2013, p. 7). She assumes that adults lack the capacities necessary to promote their own good. This line of thought is typically used to justify paternalism towards children, as children are not yet fully rational, competent, or autonomous, they are legitimately paternalized. Conly expands this view to adults, although she does not deny that children might be less rational than adults. She states that there is a quantitative, not qualitative, difference between members of the two groups. Conly insists that adults should not be treated as children. Nevertheless, her argument blurs the distinction between childhood and adulthood (Conly 2013, pp. 41–42; see also Benporath, 2010).

The respect-based model is grounded in the idea that persons should be respected in their autonomy, or their authority over their own lives, regardless of whether their choices are in accordance with their welfare. In other words, the demand for respect trumps any consideration of welfare. This approach is mostly used to ground a strict antipaternalist position, at least towards adults. It is assumed that respect for autonomy depends on certain preconditions on the side of the person who is respected; only persons who possess the relevant rational or moral capacities are seen as appropriate addressees of respect. It is mostly taken for granted, then, that children—as persons who are not yet fully rational—cannot be respected in their autonomy, and are therefore legitimately paternalized. In an influential essay, Tamar Schapiro (1999) writes that it is inappropriate to respect children in their autonomy

because they lack a will of their own. According to Schapiro, adults' acting is guided by a 'unified perspective' that counts as the expression of their will (Schapiro, 1999 p. 729).

One advantage of characterizing educational practice as essentially paternalistic might be that the justificatory models developed in the debate on paternalism could be transferred into the realm of education. It is dubious, however, whether those justificatory accounts can be of use in the educational field. Consider the respect-based model: It states that children cannot and should not be respected. This amounts to a general legitimation of paternalistic education. It is left open, however, whether there are normative limits to paternalistic coercion, or educational control.

It could be argued that within the respect-based framework, all those types of educational practice are justified that are necessary to promote the development of the capacity for autonomy. Autonomy might be seen as an educational aim, in this context, because having this capacity is a precondition for respect. The argument is, then, that children should be enabled to become appropriate addressees of respect (for their autonomy).

This common line of thought can be questioned on several counts. First, it can be pointed out that the argument refers to the idea of autonomy in two different functions. Autonomy functions as a precondition for respect, in the respect-based model. Turned into an educational aim, however, autonomy gains a new theoretical function: It is now a value that is to be promoted.

This demand to promote autonomy—and this is a second point—results in the view that any educational measure that in fact promotes the development of autonomy is legitimate. This account is strictly future-oriented and considers the present situation of the children merely with regards to the promotion of a future good.

Third, when we think of autonomy as an educational aim, we usually refer to highly demanding understandings of this notion. We think of the capacity for critical and self-critical thinking, or the idea that persons should develop a coherent and stable self. However, if we take ideas of this kind as a precondition for respect, this will most likely lead to the conclusion that many of the so-called adults will not qualify as addressees of respect. In order to protect adults from paternalism and paternalistic education, we have to set a low standard of rationality or competence. A minimal notion of rationality, however, is not attractive as an educational aim. This is why it seems implausible to claim that the type of autonomy that functions as a precondition for respect can directly be transformed into an educational aim.

Let us now turn to the welfarist model: According to this approach, paternalistic education is legitimate to the extent that it promotes (or maximises) a person's overall welfare. Against this backdrop, it can be assumed that there is a range of capacities, attitudes, or forms of knowledge that are necessary to lead a good life. It will then be argued that children are not yet capable of setting and pursuing the relevant aims for themselves. This is why it serves their interests to set up asymmetrical educational constellations in which they are brought to develop valuable traits. Insofar as children are constrained or controlled in the education process, this might constitute particular types of harm. According to common welfarist models, the harm produced in the educational situation must enter the intrapersonal welfarist calculus – harming a person at one point is justified if it is necessary to bring about a greater good in the future. A position along these lines is defended, for instance, by Dieter Birnbacher (2015, p. 118). Birnbacher claims that 'future goods and bads should be treated in exactly the same way as present ones' (Birnbacher, 2015). In most cases, the harm done in the present is likely to be much less grave than the good that arises from the possession of valuable capacities throughout one's (adult) life.

So, the welfarist model, at least in this version, makes it easy to justify (future-oriented) educational paternalism.

One problem of this account is that educators can never know for certain what the consequences of their interventions will be. They might intend to bring about positive consequences for the child, but in fact there will be no effect, or the opposite effect. Against this background, burdening the child in the present situation seems morally problematic. But even if educators could rely on causal-deterministic laws that would allow them to choose effective measures, it can be asked whether the welfarist account gives enough weight to the present welfare of the child.

At this point, we might introduce strict constraints on future-oriented welfarist considerations. It might be asked, for instance, whether it can be legitimate to use humiliating forms of punishment, in order to promote children's learning processes. Within a welfarist framework, it might well be that the harm of beating or humiliating children is outweighed by future benefits, assuming that humiliating children really has the desired effect. So, if we want to ground the view that humiliating forms of punishment should be strictly forbidden, we must go beyond welfarism. We might rely on the idea that children should be 'respected' in some sense or other. This amounts to a 'hybrid' model that features future-oriented educational considerations as restricted by a principle of respect. Of course, this principle cannot be identical to the principle of respect for autonomy used in the anti-paternalistic argument. If children are considered as appropriate addressees of (paternalistic) education, they cannot be fully respected in their autonomy. So, it must further be explained what a child-specific form of respect involves and to what extent it limits future-oriented demands.

However it is spelled out, this model is not fully satisfactory from an educational point of view. It presents educational practice as a future-oriented project that cannot be pursued to its ultimate consequence due to non-educational normative restrictions. This creates the impression that, educationally, it would be appropriate to do everything possible to bring about the right consequences, but that there are non-educational, respect-based reasons against it.

The upshot of these considerations is that the justificatory models developed in the debate on paternalism cannot be directly applied to the sphere of education. So, even if educational practice is conceptualized as a form of paternalism—as proposed by Drerup—this does not lead us very far with regard to the justification of education. If we want to justify education, we have to justify practices of education, not paternalism.

Educational Address

So, let us think about education! The following considerations focus on the practices of educators, and their relationship to the learners within these practices. In this vein, education might be characterized as an asymmetrically structured social practice directed at the promotion of learning and development.⁴

⁴ This picture of educational practice as asymmetrically structured invites a 'power-theoretical' critique of educational address. While I do not pursue this route myself, I see it as one possible way of dealing with this issue.

Those who participate in this practice have different statuses: they are either educators or learners.⁵ These statuses are constituted by particular rights and duties. The educators have the responsibility of organizing and promoting learning processes. It is a question of normative debate how the duties and rights of educators and learners are spelled out. In typical cases involving children, educators have far-reaching rights and duties towards the learners. This creates a strong form of (normative) asymmetry between educators and learners. In constellations of this type, educators typically act from the idea that their judgement of how learners should act, how they should develop, or what they should learn, is superior to the learner's own judgement (the superiority condition). This is not to say, however, that educators hold themselves superior in any respect. It might well be that children possess capacities, or relevant forms of knowledge, that adults lack.

A further conceptual issue is that educational practice, in its core aspects, is constituted by communicative acts. Common conceptual accounts of paternalism do not refer to communication, although typical acts of paternalism involve communicative elements. For instance, the state that bans smoking will announce this to its citizens. While paternalistic interventions might work without words (e.g., if someone is hindered from crossing a dilapidated bridge by physical force), communication is essential in educational processes. Educators sometimes put external constraints on the learner, but ultimately education is directed at the development of an individual's personal traits. The development of valuable personal traits cannot be promoted in a direct causal way, such as by neuro-surgical intervention. At least, we would not call this kind of strategy 'educational'. Rather, educational practice relies on speech acts. To educate someone means to address him or her in a specific way. The notion of educational address captures an important feature of educational situations, although it does not provide an exhaustive picture of what educational practice is. Clearly, education can involve aspects that are not strictly communicative. Sometimes, students are directly coerced and, sometimes, teachers arrange learning environments for their students to learn in a self-directed way. As I would like to suggest, however, these non-communicative features are typically embedded in an ongoing practice of communication between teachers and students. For instance, to initiate self-directed forms of learning, teachers will address their students in a specific way in order to motivate and guide them. Also, coercive measures are likely to be announced, explained, or justified to students at some point.

We might distinguish two aspects of educational address. First, educational address summons, directs, or commands learners in the educational situation to do certain things, oftentimes in connection with motivating and encouraging messages. This might be called the *directive* aspect of educational address. Second, educational communication transmits descriptive and normative views, that is, beliefs as to what is the case, and values or norms expressing what is good and right. I call this the *epistemic* aspect of educational address. Both aspects are intertwined in educational communication. Educators express values in their conduct towards learners and the directions they give. Those directions instruct the learners as to how to take up epistemic content, or how to undertake self-directed inquiries.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that some typical forms of educational address *react* to what learners say or do. We might roughly distinguish two types of reactive educational address. Educators

⁵ It should be pointed out that the considerations in this essay focus on the education of children, and the specific forms of asymmetry in the relationship between adults and children. We might also speak of an asymmetry in the case of educational relationships among adults (professor/student), but this is not the focus of my consideration. A constellation of this type is most likely not to be characterized as quasi-paternalistic, and does not create the same justificatory issues as the education of children.

evaluate what learners say or do, that is, when they express their knowledge or perform their skills. This reaction is epistemic in character, as it refers to standards of truth and correctness. *Evaluative* educational address might thus be conceptualised as a form of epistemic address. *Disciplinary* address, by contrast, is directive in character, and reacts to inappropriate behaviours on the side of students. It starts with the common call for silence in class, and might result in harsher disciplinary measures.

Addressing learners in these various ways presupposes that these are persons who can take up what is communicated to them: the directions and admonishments as well as the epistemic content and the evaluations that constitute educational address. The learners are addressed as individuals who have some minimal form of rationality and understanding, but also some sort of freedom of the will that allows them to react to educational address in an individual way.

We might say, then, that the idea of educational address is incompatible with the view that children are objects to be moulded by educational interventions. It can be asked whether this is a conceptual or a normative point; addressing learners as persons might be considered as constitutive for the concept of educational address. Alternatively, it might be stated that addressing children as persons is morally required by the status of children as persons. If we take this latter view, it must be made clear that the notion of educational address, in itself, does not entail a strong moral principle of respect for persons. Addressing children as persons (in the sense implied by educational address) is compatible with disrespecting them. Educational address entails that children are (in a weak sense) acknowledged as persons and not treated as mere objects.

Against this background, it can be assumed that education will only become effective if the educational address is taken up by the learners. The learners must, in some sense, accept and adopt what is communicated to them and believe or not believe what they are told. To educate persons does not mean to directly ‘implant’ certain (epistemic) features in them, but to activate them in ways that help to develop the relevant traits and capacities, and acquire knowledge. Some forms of educational address have the aim that the learners take up particular values or views and adopt them. Only if the learners make them their own, in some sense, can we expect them to act on them later on. Other forms of educational address try to activate the learners in a broader sense, for instance, to let them discover or invent things by themselves.

The Justification of Educational Address

This conceptual account of what it means to ‘educate’ someone is set up to elucidate a particular justificatory issue in education.⁶ It seems clear, however, that this normative problem does not arise with all forms of educational address. Take, for example, adults attending a language class. First, these persons participate in this educational setting by their own choice, and have the possibility of leaving it. By contrast, children—in most cases—have not chosen to be in a particular constellation, such as the family or the school. Even if they have no desire to leave and are not directly coerced to stay, they do not partici-

⁶ This corresponds to a ‘pragmatist’ or ‘functionalist’ understanding of concept usage: The idea is it cannot (or should not) be the aim of conceptual analysis to provide a context-independent account of ‘education’. Instead, we should ask from the outset, which function this concept is to play within a specific theoretical discourse. In this case, the conceptual account is set up for justificatory purposes.

pate fully voluntarily. Second, the language class takes up only a small amount of the participants' time. Most of their days, they spend in non-educational settings, or are themselves in the status of educators, as parents or teachers. Children's lives, by contrast, are dominated by various educational constellations. Third, the language class is set up to promote specific types of (language) skills, and to transmit knowledge relevant in this limited sphere. By contrast, educational settings involving children are directed at the development of their selves: their personalities, identities, and value systems. Education (in the sense of *Bildung*) is often thought of as affecting the person as a whole and transforming her 'outlook'.

So, while educational communication in adult education might raise moral issues of its own, it does not require the kind of moral justification that I have in mind here. A special need for justification arises with regard to forms of educational address directed at core features of the self, and embedded in comprehensive, non-voluntary educational constellations. We might start by asking if—and if yes, why—addressing rational or autonomous adults in this way is morally problematic.

On the one hand, there are many things that adults do not yet know, or are unable to do, and could yet learn. The average adult's capacity for autonomy, rational deliberation, or moral agency is not fully developed. Also, many adults lack a stable and coherent system of values. They are, on the whole, far from perfect and there would be reason to promote their development. On the other hand, however, it is mostly taken for granted that adults should have a right to decide for themselves what they want to learn or how they want to develop their personality. This seems clear, at least in a liberal antipaternalist perspective, as far as capacities or attitudes related to persons' well-being are concerned. It might be more contested when it comes to moral agency. Clearly, we are entitled to make moral demands on adults. Showing so-called reactive attitudes (such as moral indignation), and blaming others morally is not paternalistic. But how is this common sort of moral address (Darwall, 2006) to be distinguished from educational address? After all, moral forms of address might have educational effects in that they alter others' moral views and future behaviours.

For one, the specifics of educational address lie in the attitudes and intentions of the educators. Educators act from the view that their own judgement as to how other persons should develop is superior to these persons' own judgement, and attempt to shape the moral character of the others in this vein.⁷

In addition, it can be pointed out that typical forms of educational address are embedded in asymmetrical constellations. The crucial normative question is not whether a person should be educationally addressed once by a stranger in the street, but whether it is legitimate to set up a social arrangement that is constituted by certain forms of educational address. It is in these constellations that the addressees of education cannot easily bypass what is communicated to them, and are more likely to be influenced by it in their development.

Justifying educational address presupposes that legitimate aims are pursued by the educator. Clearly, various kinds of aims—welfarist, moral, civic—can be justified, and the justificatory endeavour must be sensitive to varying spheres of education (such as the family or the public school system). I do not

⁷ It should be noted that in adult education, too, teachers are (and feel) superior in some regards. In a language class, the teacher is expected to be superior to the students in her language skills. It would be problematic (in a paternalistic sense) if she would feel superior in a broader sense, regarding students' basic decisions of how they should develop, and how they should live.

elaborate on this issue, here. My point is that even if the aims of education are justified, addressing persons educationally might not be legitimate. It must further be clarified who is a legitimate addressee of educational communication. In line with common justifications of paternalism, we might argue that only persons who are not yet competent, rational, or autonomous ('children') should be educationally addressed in the way just outlined whereas autonomous persons ('adults') should be ascribed a right to determine their courses of personal development and learning themselves.⁸

This raises two related questions: 1) which capacities—and which level in the development of these capacities—are necessary to count as an 'adult'? And 2) how should we treat persons in the transition from childhood to adulthood ('teenagers' or 'adolescents')? The specific problem that must be addressed here is that certain adolescents might not significantly differ from some so-called adults, as far as their judgemental and agential capacities are concerned.⁹

The justification of education in its quasi-paternalistic forms, then, requires an account of its legitimate addressees in combination with a justification of the aims that are pursued. However, not all educational communication addressing the right kind of persons, and directed at the right kind of aims, are legitimate. The justification of educational practice requires, as a third element, a normative account of the relationship between educators and learners in the educational constellation itself.

As has been made clear in the last section, an appropriate justificatory account should neither be purely future-oriented (or 'aim-oriented'), nor should it rely on the idea of maximizing the overall welfare of the child. We might assume, then, that legitimate forms of legitimate educational address should be guided by a specific form of educational 'respect' or 'recognition' that goes beyond what is already implicit in the concept of educational address itself. The general idea is that children should be addressed as morally relevant persons in a way that accounts for their specific capacities and individual attitudes.

In order to specify this notion of educational respect, we can turn back to the aspects or types of educational address distinguished earlier. As regards the epistemic aspect, it seems clear what respecting learners amounts to. It means first of all that children's rational capacities—to the extent that they have already evolved—should not be bypassed in educational practice. Learners should not be deceived or manipulated, but be addressed as rational persons capable of understanding and critically evaluating what is communicated to them. They should be enabled and encouraged to take a critical stance towards what is said in the classroom and outside. In addition to respecting and promoting children's rational capacities, educators should take children seriously in what they presently think, want, value, or care for. This means—at least—that learners should have to opportunity to articulate their own views, and are supported in further developing them (Stojanov 2009).

⁸ Clearly, more should be said on notions such as autonomy and competence. I cannot do this here, but my proposal would be to do so in line with current debates on personal autonomy in the 'analytic' branch of philosophy (e.g. Christman 2009; Taylor 2005). Alternatively, it is possible – of course – to take a radically critical stance towards the idea of autonomy, as it is often done within the poststructuralist framework. It should be noted, however, that taking this latter route calls the whole project of justifying education as a quasi-paternalistic practice into question: If no human being can be characterized as autonomous (in some sense or other), the normative distinction between legitimate and illegitimate addressees of education loses its point.

⁹ For a discussion of this problem see Schrag 1977; Anderson & Claassen, 2012; Franklin-Hall 2013; see also Grill 2018; Schouten 2018.

At the same time, it is clear that learners cannot always *act* in accordance with their own wants in educational constellations. This leads to the directive aspect of educational address: in summoning learners to do certain things, educators interfere with their freedom of action. While these interferences might in principle be legitimate, some types of constraints can nevertheless be seen as disrespectful. There are, for instance, forms of comprehensive educational control that leave no room for independent agency. These educational practices are problematic because they tend to undermine individuals' processes of learning: When young people have no opportunity to take their own decisions, they cannot exercise their decision-making capacities and are hindered from learning from their own faults. Apart from this, however, an overly restrictive education is morally wrong regardless of possible consequences related to learning, simply because it disrespects learners as agents. In particular, it hinders them from acting according to their own views and values—to the extent that they have already evolved—and from pursuing projects of their own.

This consideration is based on a notion of respect for the agency or autonomy of learners. The concept of respect might also be used in a broader sense, not restricted to agency-related concerns. Respecting persons in their 'dignity' could mean, for instance, to recognise them in their status as equals. Some forms of educational address can then be seen as violating learners in their moral status by degrading or humiliating them. This normative view might be related to an empirical perspective on the development of the human self. It is often assumed that disrespectful forms of (educational) address undermine the development of persons' self-respect or self-esteem (Honneth 1995; Stojanov 2009). Being respected or recognised can thus be seen as a precondition for the development of an appropriate self-conception: *Bildung* as self-development depends of respectful forms of educational address.

Educational address in its various forms—in particular those characterized as reactive—has been used to degrade learners or has, at least, been used in ways that make learners feel degraded. As regards evaluative address, it is clear that teachers are not only legitimised but also required to mark incorrect statements and performances of students as flawed. Communicating to learners where they are wrong is one way to support them in their learning processes. However, there is much that can go wrong in this field. Educational evaluations might be inaccurate, particularly in regard to the academic ability of women and immigrants, possibly due to negative stereotypes regarding certain groups of students.¹⁰ In addition to the fact that it might be seen as morally wrong in itself to provide stereotype-based evaluations, it also has negative consequences with regard to persons' future learning, specifically because it is likely to undermine students' self-esteem or self-confidence as learners. One problem of evaluative address is that even accurate (negative) evaluations can have a discouraging effect on learners. Teachers should thus be careful in their evaluative communications, if only for consequentialist reasons, that is, in order to avoid undermining individuals' learning processes.

Disciplinary educational address might be justified as expressing legitimate epistemic (in particular, moral) content. This is the case when a child is admonished for bullying others. Another type of justification is functionalist in that it refers to the function of discipline in safeguarding opportunities for learning in educational constellations. Humiliating forms of punishment—which were central to some traditional forms of education—are beyond what is justified in this regard because they do not seem

¹⁰ At this point, we might refer to Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice, and the role she ascribes to prejudiced judgement in credibility ascriptions (Fricker 2007; Kotzee 2017).

necessary for successful teaching and learning. Also, as forms of assault on the dignity of persons, humiliating forms of disciplinary address are wrongful in themselves. In addition, they are wrong because they tend to undermine learners' self-respect.

The upshot of these considerations is that, by focussing on educational address as a core feature of the concept of educational practice, we can develop a justificatory account that—while taking up some elements from the normative debate on paternalism—is preferable to the main models developed in that debate. At the centre of the account sketched here is the notion of respectful educational address, that is, a form of communication that respects learners as persons while pursuing aims regarding their development.

In the hybrid account discussed earlier, respect functions as a normative constraint on education. In the model presented here, by contrast, some notion of respect or recognition is built into the account of educational address itself. The moral demand for respectful educational address applies to educational constellations of all kinds, including adult education. However, the notion of respect is to be understood differently, in different contexts. As suggested, it would be disrespectful to attempt to shape an adult's value system or character within an asymmetrical educational constellation. By contrast, those persons who lack the capacity to determine their own development are not disrespected when they are subject to comprehensive forms of education. At the same time, however, not all forms of addressing them educationally are in line with the demand for respect. Even if the right kinds of aims are pursued, educational address might be illegitimate because it disregards learners as persons. A form of respect – that is compatible with quasi-paternalistic interferences – should be considered as a 'moral baseline' when it comes to addressing persons educationally.

Conclusion

Drerup (2015, p. 65) presents paternalism as an 'indigenous' concept of educational theory. In this essay, I argue that we should not expect a (contested) concept taken from political and legal philosophy to settle the conceptual and normative problems of education. If we look for 'genuinely' educational concepts and forms of justification, we should start with the concept of education itself. I also claim, however, that by taking the debate on paternalism into account, we can shed light on an important justificatory issue in the educational sphere. The basic idea is that some forms of educational practice require a type of justification that is structurally analogous to the justification of paternalism. This means in the first place that the justification of education cannot be reduced to the justification of its aims.

I propose to build the justificatory account on a conceptual view of educational practice as constituted by a specific kind of communication: educational address. The claim is that some forms of educational address, namely those directed at the person as a whole, and embedded into constellations in which the learners do not take part voluntarily, require special justification. At the heart of the normative account I place the notion of respectful forms of educational address that entail an aim-oriented perspective and are compatible with quasi-paternalistic constraints.

References

- Anderson, J. & Claassen, R. (2012). Sailing alone: Teenage autonomy and regimes of childhood. *Law and Philosophy*, 31(5): 495–522.
- Benner, D. (2015). Erziehung und Bildung! Zur Konzeptualisierung eines erziehenden Unterrichts, der bildet. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 61(4): 481–496.
- Benporath, S. (2010). *Tough choices. Structured paternalism and the landscape of choice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Birnbacher, D. (2015). Paternalism in education and the future. In A. Bagattini & C. Mcleod (Eds.), *The nature of children's well-being. Theory and practice* (pp. 107–122). Springer: Dordrecht.
- Christman, J. (2009). *The politics of persons. Individual autonomy and socio-historical selves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conly, S. (2013). *Against autonomy. Justifying coercive paternalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cuyper, S. (2012). R. S. Peters' 'The justification of education' revisited. *Ethics and Education*, 7(2): 3–14.
- Darwall, S. (2006). *The second-person standpoint: Morality, respect and accountability*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Drerup, J. (2013). *Paternalismus, Perfektionismus und die Grenzen der Freiheit*. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Drerup, J. (2015). Autonomy, perfectionism, and the justification of education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 34(1): 63–87.
- Drerup, J. (2016). (Re-)konstruktion praxisinhärenter Normen. Zur Eigenstruktur pädagogischer Rechtfertigungsverhältnisse. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 62(4): 531–550.
- Drerup, J. (2017). What if anything is wrong with paternalism towards children? *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 24(4): 348–367.
- Dworkin, G. (1972). Paternalism. *The Monist*, 56(1): 64–84.
- Feinberg, J. (1971). Legal paternalism. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 1(1): 105–124.
- Franklin-Hall, A. (2013). On becoming an adult: Autonomy and the moral relevance of life's stages. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 63(251): 223–247.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grill, K. (2018). Paternalism towards children. In A. Gheaus, G. Calder & J. de Wispelaere (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of the philosophy of childhood and children* (pp. 123–133). London: Routledge.
- Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Humboldt, W. von (1980). Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen (1792). In *Werke in fünf Bänden* (vol. 1.). Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Kotzee, B. (2017). Education and epistemic justice. In I. J. Kidd et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 324–335). London: Routledge.
- Mill, J.S. (1956). *On liberty*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. (Original Work Published 1879).
- Marneffe, P. (2006). Avoiding paternalism. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 34(1): 68–94.
- Peters, R.S. (1966). *Ethics and education*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Peters, R.S. (2010). The justification of education. In *Education and the education of teachers* (pp. 86–118). London/New York: Routledge. (Originally Published 1973).

- Quong, J. (2010). *Liberalism without perfection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schapiro, T. (1999). What is a child? *Ethics* 109(4): 715–738.
- Schouten, G. (2018). Paternalism and education. In K. Grill & J. Hanna (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of the philosophy of paternalism* (pp. 336–347). London: Routledge.
- Schrag, F. (1977). The child in the moral order. *Philosophy*, 52(200): 167–177.
- Shiffrin, S.V. (2000). Paternalism, unconscionability doctrine, and accommodation. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 29(3): 205–250.
- Stojanov, K. (2009). Overcoming social pathologies in education: On the concept of respect in R.S. Peters and Axel Honneth. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43 (Suppl. 1): 161–72.
- Taylor, J.S. (ed.) (2005). *Personal autonomy: New essays on personal autonomy and its role in contemporary moral philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

About the Author

Johannes Giesinger, PhD, is a research affiliate at the University of Zürich's Centre for Ethics. He also teaches philosophy at the Kantonsschule Sargans (Switzerland). His research interests lie in the philosophy of education and the ethics of childhood. Contact: giesinger@st.gallen.ch; Personal website: www.erziehungsphilosophie.ch