

In commenting on the nature of freedom, it is argued that the positive aspect of freedom involves the preparation of the child, through inculcation of knowledge and skills, so that he may exercise meaningful choices and be aware of various possibilities. In general, it is argued that the environment inevitably affects such development of skill and knowledge and that educators have a responsibility deliberately to intervene so as to provide a learning environment which encourages a wider range of skill and knowledge in the child.

*RALPH M. MILLER

RESPONSIBILITY FOR FREEDOM

Professor Hopkins is correct in stressing that freedom has positive and negative aspects; negatively it implies absence of restraint and, positively, it implies provision of opportunity. Unfortunately, his consideration of the positive aspect of freedom is too limited, in particular, it overlooks a primary responsibility of parents, educators and any other persons involved in child-rearing. Opportunity cannot be limited to Professor Hopkins' idea of simply providing the child with an environment which affords him the chance to do various things. An individual's opportunities to act depend upon the skills he possesses, and also upon his state of knowledge, as much as they depend upon the environment in which he is placed. A child who cannot read, for example, enjoys no great increase of opportunity when he is offered the resources of a large library rather than being confined to a series of textbooks. How would a child know, for example, that he wanted music lessons unless he had previously had the opportunity of hearing music, had seen musicians performing and, altogether, had developed some knowledge of music? One must be acquainted, in some degree, with a prospective endeavour before one can have an interest that is more than a whim.

Just because we may make no deliberate provision for musical experience for the child and let what he hears be a matter of chance, does not make his experience of music any more free. A child responds to his environment in either case. Thus, if we are to speak meaningfully about providing opportunities we must emphasize the deliberate effort to stimulate children and to encourage the development of skills and knowledge.

We must select the skills and information which will give children a better basis for choosing among possible opportunities and which will, moreover, open to them ranges of opportunity which would otherwise be closed. In placing this emphasis on the positive aspect of freedom, there is no attempt to offer a complete analysis of the term, but only an effort to stress that the capacity to use freedom develops through experience.

*In my comments on the nature of freedom I am indebted to my graduate research assistant, Miss Janice M. Vian, for trenchant argument on several specific points.

Freedom is socially acquired and depends on the nature of one's contact with others; it grows or shrinks as social contacts determine. Thus, children are not born free — infants cannot even choose to live or not — they must be controlled, i.e. babied. They can acquire freedom only as they gain knowledge and skill and become better able to understand the consequences of the choices they make. The child, or even the naive tourist, who chooses to hand-feed the bears, may not thank us for leaving him free to make that choice if it results in his being mauled. It is a choice he would not have made had he known better. To make wise choices which preserve and extend freedom requires knowledge, and it is a paltry freedom which merely removes restraints, or even provides opportunities *without providing the basis of knowledge which enables discriminating choice among possibilities*. Freedom without wisdom is short-lived.

While there is justification for saying that adults should not prescribe in detail all that a child should learn, there is an even stronger case for saying that some guidance by those of greater experience is the essential training for a significant exercise of freedom. Thus, when Professor Hopkins declares "it is the child's right to determine whether our influence is interference or opportunity," he must either be assuming some frame of reference within which the child can make this judgement or else he is merely insisting on the child's right to say "yes" or "no" for any reason, however whimsical. If there is a frame of reference, some deliberate effort to bring the child to the point where he can judge his relations with others and can decide how far he needs their help must be presupposed. Even a deliberate effort to place the child in choice-making situations so as to build his confidence in his ability to make up his own mind represents a judgement about what the child should learn. In a strict sense, it is an imposition upon the child to bring him further into the exercise of freedom.

The position may be expressed as a paradox: unless parents and teachers (and perhaps many others) decide that children shall acquire freedom and guide them into experiences which foster the making of knowing choices, children cannot mature, cannot grow into effective use of freedom. It is more important that children should grow into adults who can operate freely and wisely than that they should, as children, suffer no impositions.

When Professor Hopkins refers to the free schools' tendency to evaluate their success by evaluating the educational environment, he touches on one of the most uncertain, and, yet, most important points in the effort to make pupils more free. He says free schools evaluate the "educational environment to see if it has excited and satisfied each child's interests and desires without determining his choices for him." The talk about freedom for the pupil is most often bound up with this idea of attention to the child's interests and, also, most often, the talk neglects to consider how interests develop and treats them as somehow intrinsic to the child. The interests of a child, at any moment, reflect his past experience with adults, his peers, and all the things constituting his environment. To regard his interests at some particular time as given or, in some sense, inviolable, is to decree that the ex-

ternal influences which have shaped his interests to that time, are to have special status. The suggestion that teachers must accept pupils' interests as given, and must particularly avoid judgements as to what children should be interested in, is tantamount to saying that the teacher's influence, which should ideally be informed and generous, must defer to the influence of the child's previous experience, however haphazard that may have been.

In citing the teacher's possible influence as informed and generous I am assuming a good teacher and am not denying that there is every reason to object to rigid and stupid imposition of adult choices on children. Rather than discussion of control of children *per se*, *specific* questions of control and influence should be considered. The "freedom for children" literature is essentially a reaction against the *misuse* of powers by adults and cruelty to children. Such cruelty and stupidity can rightly be criticized without rejecting all intentional control of children by adults. The practices to be criticized are actually dysfunctional, in that they prevent the child from gaining maturity — acquiring greater ability to use freedom. We can, for example, criticize the dogmatic teacher because he influences children to grow up to accept authority rather than evidence. In rejecting dogmatism we need not reject all use of authority by teachers.

In sum, my contention is that the school cannot contribute significantly to the child's freedom merely by accepting his present range of interest and, superficially, "leaving him free." One of the greatest contributions of education is to draw children to new and wider interests. Education must therefore have a positive and directive emphasis; teachers and schools cannot avoid being significant parts of the child's environment and it is their responsibility to be informed and deliberate in their influence upon the child. That is what education *is*: the intentional cultivation of children so they will have effective access to their culture. Education is not only providing students opportunity to be aware of these cultural resources; it is presenting them in a way that ensures students will know enough to choose wisely among them.

As educators we should be in default of our moral responsibility if we decide to refrain from giving students guidance and thereby reduce ourselves to being entertainers or babysitters. Such refusal to make any choices for students wrongs them just as surely as the attempt to make every choice for them.