

Must There Be a Fundamental Aim of Education?

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Abstract

Across the history of philosophy of education, there have been attempts to provide an answer to the question *what is the fundamental aim of education*. Such a question is considered a substantive question. But nowhere in the literature has the notion of *fundamental aim of education* (FAE hereinafter) been problematized. Thinkers have always assumed that FAE is necessary. This paper problematizes this assumption by raising and answering this meta-question: *Must there be a fundamental aim of education?* It is so done by utilizing some conclusions from the field of epistemology, and using them as a model in arguing that there must be a FAE. The methodology used here is *philosophical justification*. This paper also defuses an objection to FAE as raised by philosopher of education R.S. Peters. Lastly, if the necessity of the FAE is clear to the teacher, then the teacher will be more intentional in her practices, more guided in her pedagogy, and more inclined toward justifications in her selection among educational options. All of these would lead to the teacher being more reflective in all instances of her practices. And such would have great benefits to the students.

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Consider these two questions (Soltis, 1973, p. 14): (1) *What is the definition of education?* and (2) *Does it make sense to seek the definition of education?* Questions similar to (1) are what educationalists are mostly concerned about. Indeed, these are theoretical questions. But such questions are fraught with assumptions and presuppositions. Consider (1) Attempting to provide an answer to it presupposes that it makes sense to seek the definition of education. One would not even attempt to answer (1) without presupposing an affirmative answer to (2). Although as Lani Watson puts it, "the identification of educational aims may be considered, from a historical perspective, the more foundational task within philosophy of education (Watson, 2016, p. 151)," and such an inquiry is similar to question (1), philosophers of education are more concerned with questions similar to (2). (1) refers to *substantive questions*, but (2) refers to *meta-questions*. The latter are construed as: "Questions of meaning and, as such, generally are non-substantive; that is, they do not deal with the factual or valuation substance of the topic. Rather, they are questions that seek conceptual clarity before commitment to the substantive exploration of a topic" (Soltis, 1973, pp. 14-15).

In this paper, instead of asking the substantive question what is the fundamental aim of education, a meta-question will be explored and answered instead: *Must there be a fundamental aim of education?* Answering the former implies an affirmative response to the latter. But is it really the case that an affirmative answer is given to the latter? Hence this work in philosophy of education. This shall be done by tapping an idea from the field of epistemology, specifically *epistemic justification*, given that the said meta-question to be answered is primarily a question of justification. The methodology used here can roughly be called *philosophical justification*. Also, the argument of R.S. Peters that there need not be a FAE shall be addressed.

Explanation of the Methodology Utilized

An activity will never be considered philosophical without the provision of rational justification. As Jonas F. Soltis says: "When philosophers [of education] perform... there is more

emphasis on ascertaining the logical soundness of argument... justifying value claims, constructing reasonable arguments and providing ways to think about educational tasks and problems” (Soltis, 1983, p. 17). To underscore Soltis’ point, the task now falls on *justification* and the *construction of reasonable arguments*. This is seconded by David Carr when he says that “[the] central task... of educational philosophers [is] characterized as the exploration of the *reasons for holding this rather than that position*” (Carr, 2010, pp. 110-111). Not only is this an avenue of providing justification for a particular claim, but also reflective of one of the ways of how philosophy can be used in the field of education. Israel Scheffler refers to it as “the utilization of results already achieved in the autonomous development of research” (Scheffler, 1973, p. 14). The answer to be given to the meta-question will be an affirmative. Since it is a claim, justification will have to be itemized to make it acceptable and tenable. But the justification to be utilized will be borrowed from a particular tenet from the field of epistemology, a result of an autonomous research. Thus, the response to the meta-question shall be reflective of the methodology of Soltis, Carr, and Scheffler combined, and it is called *philosophical justification*.

Must There Be a Fundamental Aim of Education?

Philosopher of education Colin Wringe argues that logically speaking, one cannot engage in any educational activity without the notion of aim, that it is something that cannot be sustained. He argues thus: one cannot even commence with the activity without even thinking about the aim of the said activity, or what one aims to achieve via the activity, and since education is an activity, then it is conceptually impossible to disengage aim from education (Wringe, 1988, pp. 5-6). This is called the *conceptual argument* for the necessity of aim in education. Another philosopher of education who argues similarly is Ynhui Park. He says that “since education is an intentional activity, the concept of education without the concept of its goal or aim is analytically unintelligible” (Park, 1997, p. 7). This establishes the logical connection between *intentional activity* and *aim*. An intentional activity can be likened to saying ‘I am going to jog every day to

lose weight.’ The mere utterance of this statement already indicates the aim of jogging, i.e., *to lose weight*. Another way of looking at this is that it is a contradiction to say that ‘I am going to jog every day to lose weight’ and affirm that the activity of engaging in jogging has no aim at all. Such is conceptually preposterous. This is why philosophers and philosophers of education who have proposed their respective views of the concept of education have always included an exploration and identification of the aim of education. He adds: “a philosophy of education is never complete unless it has a concrete view on the aims of education” (Park, 1997, p. 7).

The attentive reader, however, would retort that the above *conceptual argument* does not really answer the question at hand. This conceptual conclusion does not logically support the necessity of having a FAE. The unearthed conception of “aim” within the concept of “education” does not necessarily entail FAE. What it proves thus far is that it is logically impossible to construe education without the concept of ‘aim,’ but not that there needs to be a *fundamental aim of education*. Hence a more vigorous approach is needed.

Some preliminaries will be articulated first. It is notable to pinpoint that education, as a whole, is an intentional endeavor. Albeit there is a distinction between *education* and *schooling*, and that the latter is subsumed under the former, nevertheless, education as schooling is an enterprise of intentionality, and if an action is intentional, one can be assured that it is actuated for the achievement of the *end* (or aim) and that the step-by-step process of its realization is guided by *end* (or aim) as well. This is why Thomas Aquinas states that “in matters of action, the end, though first in intention, is last in execution” (Aquinas, 1947, p. 1711). This is not dissimilar with the idea of John Dewey about aim as “foresight in advance of the end” (Dewey, 1944, p. 102).

It cannot be denied that not everything that occurs in education is a result of intention. There is actually the idea of *unintended consequences*, and R.S. Peters himself even opines that “most of the important things in education are passed on in this manner – an attitude, a skill, is caught; sensitivity, a critical mind, respect for people and facts develop where an articulate and intelligent exponent is on the job” (Peters, 1973, p. 129). And

because of this observation, Peters concludes that “the model of means to ends is not remotely applicable to the transaction that is taking place” (Peters, 1973, p. 129), which is contrary to the idea that *intentionality* is prominent in education. He seems to be saying that education is not a result of intentionality, the way in which Aquinas and Dewey construe aim. In other words, Peters suggests that, in his parlance, values (*viz.*, knowledge, ability, skill, disposition, understanding, etc.) in education are not transmitted by virtue of intentionality, *i.e.*, students had them not because they were thought at first prior to the actions of the teacher, but through non-intentional means. *Does this mean, then, that education is not an intentional endeavor* as proposed above? By all means no! The only thing that can be concluded from Peters’ comment above is that education is a result both of intentionality and non-intentionality. And even if such is asserted, it cannot be discounted that the conception of intentionality must take precedence over its opposite in education. No genuine educator or educational system would leave its actuation and activities to chance.

Another premise is that any intentional enterprise usually involves justification. Philosopher of language G.E.M. Anscombe could not have put it much clearer when she says: “What distinguishes actions which are intention from those which are not? The answer that I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting” (Anscombe, 1963, p. 9). It makes sense because if the subject intends that a particular action is actuated or reified, it means that the subject has a reason for doing it because if she did not have a reason, then she would not have put it into motion. Thus, for something to be intentional, the presence of justification is needed, and if it is to be affirmed that the component of intentionality takes supremacy, *i.e.*, *educationalists and educators are doing their best to make the entire educative domain, from conception to execution, as intentional as possible, then justification is given priority.* That is to say, to the best that can be done, every pre-determined content and/or activity in education is included with justification.

The idea that educationalists and educators are maximizing the presence of intentionality in education is manifested in the rigor and concern being taken to make the entire domain adequately and efficiently constructed because much money, effort, and time are involved. In the case of the Philippines, the legal document of the K-12 program entitled *Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013* or RA 10533 was released in the aforesaid year but it was only in 2016 that the first batch of Grade 11 students entered the program. Whatever the position of the reader is toward this overhaul, it cannot be denied that time was greatly spent. Furthermore, new schools were built across the country, and a voucher system was implemented allocating billions of pesos for this for the next several years. The point is that much money, effort, and time are involved, and all of these point to the conception of *maximizing intentionality in education*. If that is the case, and if intentionality includes justification, then it can be said that justification pervades education. (The point being made here is a logical one: *the maximization of intentionality and justification is correlative*. It does not however, mean that factually they are correlative. Determining whether the implementation of the K-12 program in the Philippines is profusely justified is an empirical question.)

The famed philosopher of education R.S. Peters is known for his conceptual analysis of *education*, but he recognizes that there is a limit to what can be unpacked from a concept. Education as a whole is manifold and vast in scope; much more is needed to exhaust its entirety, much more than *conceptual analysis*. Peters says:

Education implies that something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner. It would be a logical contradiction to say that a man had been educated but that he had in no way changed for the better, or that in educating his son, a man was attempting nothing that is worthwhile. This is a purely conceptual point. Such a connection between 'education' and what is valuable does not imply any particular commitment to content. It is a further question what the particular standards are in virtue of which activities are thought to be of value and what grounds there might be for

claiming that these are the correct ones. All that is implied is a commitment to what is thought valuable (Peters, 1966, p. 25).

Peters' argument for viewing education as 'something worthwhile,' good, or desirable lies in the locution "it would be a logical contradiction to say." It is similar to saying that something is a triangle but it is not a three-sided figure. It is plainly and conspicuously contradictory. The point here is that if something is considered educational, or alleged to be educational, it is, logically speaking, valuable. But Peters recognizes the limitation of this methodology because it cannot say anything else apart from its being valuable in a general sense. His preferred procedure cannot even say about the details of education, admitting that "it is a further question what the particular standards are in virtue of which activities are thought to be of value." And the idea that is pertinent to this work is that "it is a further question what... grounds there might be for claiming that these are the correct ones." The term 'ground' refers to *reason* and *justification*. In other words, there is something else, something beyond a mere conceptual analysis of *education* that provides support for the presence of a particular within the educative domain. The fact that something is included in education, whatever it is, whether in the *curriculum*, in *textbooks*, in *assessment*, in *pedagogy*, irrespective of whether it is small or not, as long as it is in education, it means that it is *intentionally placed there*. And because it is intentionally placed there, then there must be a *justification* or *reason* for its inclusion. However, conceptual analysis is silent in this area. Hence arises the idea that something else is to be tapped that would provide justification to the specificities of the manifold in education.

Another supporting argument is this: Suppose that the recipients of the basic educational system of the Philippines were immortals. If that were so, then it would not make much of a difference in spending so much time (prior to the execution of the enterprise) which would be included in the curriculum or not. Their lives would never be punctuated thereby giving them the opportunity to be able to study anything. Not much time, effort,

reflection, and resources are needed to be spent deciding the *what* and *how* of their education because they actually had all the time in the world to learn everything. But that is not the case with reality. Human lives are brief; it is already a blessing to reach 70 years old. And because human lives are short, the educational system must adjust accordingly, i.e., it is *limited*. Thus, the basic educational system of the Philippines is only for 13 years (including kindergarten). The design is to equip the student with the wherewithal in such a way that she would be able to navigate through her brief life the way she sees it fit. Contrast this to a student who is immortal. The sense of urgency, of attention to meticulousness, of fastidious selection seem to evaporate because of immortality. But all of these come to the fore when reality is the concern: that life is brief, and that education follows suit. Given that *education is limited* (the way it is characterized above), then it would make great sense to ask why X is included in the education of Pedro, but not Y. There are so many to choose from, a diversity that exists in a limitless way, but X is chosen to be included and not Y. Since education is an intentional endeavor, it would make sense to ask why X has been selected and not Y (unless one accepts that the process is haphazardly and randomly done, which is anathema in education). Of course, Peters' point can be utilized here by saying that X is chosen because it is deemed valuable, even more valuable than Y. But if pressed on the grounds of X's valuation, Peters' methodology would be impotent to provide a convincing answer. Thus, there must be something else that is at play here? So, *what is the ground, justification, warrant for including X but not Y?*

Here enters an affirmative answer to the question at hand: *must there be a fundamental aim of education?* These are some of the remarks of philosopher of education Ynhui Park on the matter:

- (1) Without the concept of the ultimate aim of education in general, particular aims or particular educational activities are in the fundamental sense logically unintelligible because the latter aims cannot be justified without the former (Park, 1997, p.7).
- (2) The question of who, what, how and why a particular subject should be taught or learned in a particular place and time can have a satisfactory answer only in light of

an overall and underlying ultimate aim of education. All sorts of particular aims of specific educational activities are to be analyzed in terms of different ways instrumental to the ultimate aim of education (Park, 1997, p. 8).

To reiterate what has been argued above, education is an intentional enterprise, and its being intentional means that justification is involved. And given that the concept of education is incapable of providing robust justification to the specificities within the educative domain, and augmented by the fact and implication that human life is brief, therefore, education is limited, *there has to be something that would serve as a justification for what is within education*. Park states that it is the “concept of the ultimate aim of education” that makes the particularities in education intelligible, and it means that it is the fundamental aim of education (FAE) that justifies the former. The apparent problem, however, with Park’s argumentation is its lack of explication on *how* the “particular aims of particular educational activities” are justified by the FAE. Nowhere will it be seen how he connects the two; he merely states that there is a connection. Neither will it be seen, however, *how* the “who, what, how and why [of] a particular subject” is satisfactorily explained “in light of an overall and underlying ultimate aim of education.” What follows is an attempt to provide a concrete link, thereby answering affirmatively the meta-question at hand.

A theory of epistemic justification shall be utilized as a *model* in occupying the aforementioned blanks. (But take note that justifying a proposition/belief can be done in either ways: *epistemic, moral, or prudential*.) Justifying a belief usually requires another belief, that is, X_1 is said to be justified because of X_2 , or it is X_2 that confers a justificatory status on X_1 . For example, Jose is justified in believing that his classmate Nila is at the laboratory right now (X_1), and Jose is justified in believing so because Tasyo, another classmate of his, has told him so, and believes Tasyo to be trustworthy (X_2). It can be said that Jose is justified in believing that X_2 because, thus far, every time he asks Tasyo of such questions, there has never been an instance of mistake, and no display of intentional deception emanating from Tasyo (X_3). To

generalize from this, it can be said that the justification of belief is done through an evidential chain, and a formalization could be this: $X_1 \leftarrow X_2 \leftarrow X_3$. Does this mean that the evidential chain goes back *ad infinitum*? A negative response to this one is an avenue for one theory in epistemic justification. The theory that is being referred to here is *foundationalism*, and it will be helpful to borrow a characterization of it from epistemologists James Dew & Mark Foreman:

Foundationalism suggests that there are two different kinds of beliefs: basic and non-basic. A basic belief is a foundational belief that does not require argumentation or empirical data to support it. Rather, basic beliefs are those which are so deeply rooted in common sense and so necessary for our thinking that they are given foundational status. We accept these beliefs as being basic, depending on nothing else for their justification. Basic beliefs serve as the foundations for our thinking and knowing... A non-basic belief, by contrast, is a belief that is not so immediately obvious and rooted in common sense. These beliefs depend on other beliefs or other information for their intellectual support... Foundationalists claim that basic beliefs serve as the epistemic foundations for our believing and knowing, and non-basic beliefs must ultimately be supported by and built on basic beliefs (Dew & Foreman, 2014, p. 104).

This theory of epistemic justification propounds two interconnected theses, first is that there is a distinction between *basic beliefs* and *non-basic beliefs*, and, secondly, it is the latter that ultimately confer justificatory status on the former, and the relationship is irreflexive or not vice-versa. That in an evidential chain of justification, a belief is conferred justificatory status by another belief, and so on, and the series terminates in a belief that is *immediately justified* or a *basic belief* whose “degree of justification is independent of the justification it gets from other beliefs” (Lemos, 2007, p. 45). Traditionally, some examples of basic beliefs are simple logical/mathematical truths and mental states. Accepting that $1 + 1 = 2$ is something that is intuitively strong, so strong that not to affirm it is to deny common sense. The statement ‘a triangle is a three-sided figure’ is another example of a basic belief because its being justified, as said above, is independent of the justification it gets from other beliefs. Beliefs

about mental states are also good examples. If one believes that one sees a black dog on the street, then that is indisputable. What is irrefutable is *not* that there is in reality a black dog on the street, but the agent *believing* that he sees a black dog on the street. Another is that if one believes that she is sad, then such a belief that she is sad is indisputable. Such a belief is *immediately* or *non-inferentially justified* (because its being justified is not transmitted to it by another belief), in contrast to Jose's belief that Nila is at the laboratory. The latter does not have the immediate, non-inferential justification that the former possesses.

The two theses proposed by foundationalism is a result of what is called the *regress argument*. Noah Lemos formalizes it thus (2007, pp. 47-48):

- (1) Some beliefs have non-basic justification. Some beliefs are justified on the basis of other beliefs.
- (2) All beliefs that have non-basic justification are supported by an evidential or justificational chain.
- (3) All justificational chains must either:
 - i. terminate in a belief that is not justification,
 - ii. be infinitely long,
 - iii. be circular, or
 - iv. terminate in a justified basic belief.
- (4) Options (i), (ii), and (iii) are impossible.
- (5) Therefore, option (iv) is true – some justificational chains terminate in justified basic beliefs.

The *regress argument* for foundationalism is recognized to have been formulated first by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics*, and is an argument by *elimination*, given that there are only four options, and these four exhaust all possibilities, and given that (i.), (ii.), and (iii.) are impossible, therefore (iv.) surfaces as the only possible answer.

As a supplementary explication, epistemologist Michael Huemer labels (i.) as *skepticism* (the position that there are no justified beliefs), (ii.) as *infinitism* (the position that an infinite series of reasons supports a belief), (iii.) as *coherentism* (the

position that all justified beliefs are justified by virtue of the way they fit together with the rest of one's belief system, and (iv.) as *foundationalism* (Huemer, 2010).

To return, option (i.) is obviously unacceptable because how can a belief be justified if the end of the evidential chain where it is placed in is a belief that is unjustified? To use the examples above, Jose is justified in believing that Nila is in the laboratory because Tasyo told him so, and Jose believes that Tasyo is generally trustworthy. But if the chain terminates with the belief of Jose that Tasyo is trustworthy, it is virtually impossible not to ask *what justifies the belief that Tasyo is trustworthy?* It could not have ended there because that belief is plainly not justified in a self-evidential manner, similar to how basic beliefs are (allegedly) justified. A more pronounced question is *how can an unjustified belief transmit justificatory status to another if it is in itself unjustified?* Because of these considerations, (i.) is not a plausible answer.

Option (ii.) is equally problematic because it presupposes that it is possible that agents can have an infinite number of beliefs. To clarify this rejoinder, it is important to be reminded that Tasyo is justified in believing that Y_1 because of Y_2 , and he is justified in believing that Y_2 because of Y_3 . Do take note that the transference of justificatory status to Y_1 from Y_2 shows that Tasyo 'actually' believes that Y_1 and Y_2 . And that the transference of justificatory status to Y_2 from Y_3 shows that he 'actually' believes that Y_2 and Y_3 . To affirm (ii.) implies that Tasyo's evidential chain goes back *ad infinitum*, i.e., that Tasyo 'actually' believes an infinite number of beliefs *just to be able to* render justification to the most current belief at hand, which is Y_1 . But it is a psychological impossibility, especially to a finite agent, to possess an infinite set of beliefs. It would have been possible for an infinite agent thereby making possible, psychologically, the possession of an infinite number of beliefs. But for a finite agent this is impossible.

Epistemologist Louis Pojman mentions another problem besetting (ii.): "If all our beliefs are justified by appeal to other mediate beliefs [non-basic beliefs], we never arrive at what is required for justification" (Pojman, 2001, p. 106). What Pojman is saying here is that if option (ii.) would be accepted, that is, the

possibility of beliefs *ad infinitum*, it means that all beliefs would eventually be mediately justified, or justified by something else. But if there would not be an end to this evidential chain, which is the main point of (ii.), then there would not be a belief that would actually transfer justification. In other words, it is tantamount to saying that all the beliefs in this infinitely regressing chain are not justified at all. Given these two reasons just posited, then (ii.) is not an acceptable answer either.

Lastly, there is something epistemically deplorable with the statement 'Jose is justified in believing that Nila is at the laboratory because Jose believes that Nila is at the laboratory.' The argumentation Jose is justified in believing that X_1 because of X_1 is just counterintuitive, and this is what option (iii.) is all about. This response is said to endorse *circular reasoning*. This, however, is not the typical case of *circular reasoning* because even if more variables are placed at the middle, and even if the intermediaries are extended further, the fact remains that X_1 receives its justificatory status, eventually, from itself, from X_1 . X_1 is justified by X_2 , X_2 is justified by X_3 , X_3 is justified by X_4 ... and X_n is justified by X_1 , ultimately X_1 is justified by X_1 . If a belief cannot confer justification to itself, or, for it to possess a justificatory status, then there must be another belief (or a series of beliefs) that would confer such a property to it. Option (iii.) admits that this conferment of a justificatory property, eventually, comes from itself, hence it contradicts what is previously asserted, that is, a belief cannot confer justification to itself. If this is so, then option (iii.) is equally not viable.

Because the options are exhaustively listed, and the options (i.), (ii.), and (iii.) are unacceptable, then (iv.) emerges as the only solution. Therefore, the evidential chain terminates in a justified basic belief, or there exists a set of *basic beliefs*. Thus, foundationalism is the proper way of viewing the structure of justification.

To return to the meta-question of this research, *must there be a fundamental aim of education*, it is useful that the reader be reminded that education is an intentional enterprise, and that

there is even a maximization of its presence in the entire domain (as empirically supported by the time, effort, and money invested into it). Further, intentionality, especially in the areas of human actions, decisions, etc., engenders justification. If that is so, to ensure that education is highly intentional or purposive is to ensure that justification pervades the entire area. This means that a specific activity prepared by a teacher is said to be a result of intentionality, and that it is overtly accompanied by justification. This also means that in any area within education, no matter how small, grounded, or even if it is the lowest in the tier, as long as it is a product of intentionality (and the teacher aspires to do so because human lives are brief, and education is limited), then justification will have to be present, and present as ubiquitous as possible. A specific educational activity is said to be justified by a specific, low-rung aim. And this low-rung aim is said to be justified by another, and the evidential chain commences. Given that the structure of justification leads to an affirmation of foundationalism (because of the process of elimination) and that foundationalism asserts that there is a set of beliefs that are independent of other beliefs (i.e., they do not need justification from others), then it can be said that in education, there must exist a set of aims that does not require any sort of justification from other aims, and these aims are called *fundamental aims of education* or FAE.

In colloquial parlance, X is in education because of Y, and Y because of Z, and Z because of A, and eventually the justificational chain stops at B. It is not only an assertion of the fact that the chain terminates at B, but what is said is that the chain *must* stop at B, and that B is a *fundamental aim (or value)* in education. Of course, it is recognized that B could have a further justification in other areas, such as in philosophy, but if education is the only limit being considered, then B is considered fundamental, that is, none is "deeper than it," that it is already at the periphery, that none is behind the veil anymore.

Another analogy for it is the Russian nesting dolls, or the *Matryoshka* dolls. As one breaks open a doll, another one emerges, and one does it until one reaches the last doll, which means there is no doll inside it anymore. Similarly, any content within pedagogy, the curriculum, in textbooks, and within assessment is purposively selected either by the educator or the

educationalist. She does so because of a reason, and that this reason is justified by another reason, and the chain commences until it terminates in a reason that needs no justification from others, that this reason stands on its own, that this value is fundamental in such a way that it needs no other value to confer worth on it. In itself, it is valuable. In itself, it is educationally a fundamental value. This is FAE. Philosopher of education Jonas Soltis observes: "Education is a human enterprise in which people attempt to do something in a purposeful, thoughtful, and careful way. Acting purposefully with some end or procedure in mind is, in one sense at least, *holding that end or procedure as valuable*" (Soltis, 1978, p. 10). Notice that there is a seamless conceptual connection among three ideas: *intentionality*, *aim of education*, and *values*. If any activity, procedure, or low-rung aim is considered valuable, *and as long as it is considered valuable educationally*, then one cannot discount the fact that such is valuable *because of FAE*. It is the FAE that confers value on it, the way how basic beliefs confer justification to non-basic beliefs. And this is what Ynhui Park means when he utters 'without the concept of the ultimate aim of education in general, particular aims of particular educational activities are in the fundamental sense logically unintelligible because the latter aims cannot be justified without the former.' The gap has been filled, the link satisfactorily displayed, and the meta-question of this research adequately given an answer to.

Defusing R.S. Peters' Argument to the Contrary

In the area of philosophical methodology, especially the *philosophical justification* mentioned above, the strength of a thesis lies in the positive provision of reasons or supports. Thus far, this is what has been done. The statement *there must be a fundamental aim of education* has not only been uttered but reasons have been given positively. To further bolster this view, philosophy usually argues against an opposing view. Formally speaking, to philosophically justify X as the view being proposed is not only done by providing Y as a positive support for it, but also arguing against Z because the affirmation of Z implies the negation of X or that Z mitigates the strength of X. The last

portion of this work aims to defuse a common argument contra the position just argued for above.

It has been the tradition within philosophy of education, specifically Western philosophy of education, that fundamental aims of education (FAEs) have a role in the educational process (despite the diversity of the FAEs proposed). The following are the typical candidates of FAEs as enumerated by philosopher of education Ian Gregory (2002, p. 11): “the promotion of autonomy, the encouragement of a multicultural society, the producing of good Christians, the preservation of our culture, the development of a democratic citizenry, the promotion of economic development, the production of good and responsible citizens, the securing of a skilled workforce, the forging of a morally educated society, the furtherance of God’s will on earth, the creation of a society at ease in itself, and the elimination of racism and sexism in our society.”

It seems that there is no philosopher who thinks otherwise except for the 20th century British philosopher of education R.S. Peters who seems to have an ambivalent attitude and position toward this tradition, which is stipulated in his *Must an Educator Have an Aim?* (1973). Some philosophers of education labeled this work as “Professor Peters’ famous argument to the contrary” (Park, 1997, p. 7), i.e., the concept of education is analytically intelligible even without an aim, and “it seems... that he implicitly answers affirmatively” to the question *can anyone be an educator without having an aim?* (Soltis, 1978, p. 16).

Although it is clear that the primary concern of the said work is Peters' contention against the *means-end* view approach toward educational aims, he argues for such through certain pronouncements that are relevant to the issue of this paper. Below are some of his disagreements from the essay, and one sourced from another:

- (1) If a teacher was asked what he was aiming at, he might state a limited objective like 'getting at least six children through the eleven-plus.' But he might, as it were, lift his eyes a bit from the scene of battle and commit himself to one of the more general aims of education – elusive things like 'the self-realization of the individual,' 'character,' 'wisdom,' or

'citizenship... These very general aims are neither goals nor are they end-products. Like 'happiness' they are high-sounding ways of talking about doing some things rather than others and doing them in a certain manner (Peters, 1973, p. 124).

- (2) It might be objected that education is an art like medicine and that in medicine there is a commonly accepted end-product – physical health. Why should there not be a similar one for education? The answer is fairly obvious. Doctors deal mainly with the body and if they agree about what constitutes physical health it is because it can be defined in terms of physical criteria like temperature level and metabolism rate. Also, there is little objection to manipulating and tinkering with the body in order to bring about the required result... In the case of education, however, there are no agreed criteria (Peters, 1973, p. 125).
- (3) In education there is as much debate about the ends of education as there is about the methods to be adopted to promote these ends. The same is not true of medicine. There is much more consensus about what constitutes being 'cured' than there is about what constitutes being 'educated' (Hirst & Peters, 1970, p. 27).

Peters' writing style is known for his not-so-straightforward manner, and the same characterization can be said of the aforementioned quotations. It is possible, however, that his views toward the FAE be made clear from these statements. As a reminder, the main contention of this research is that there must be a fundamental aim of education (FAE). In Peters' parlance, they are called 'general aims of education.' In another work of his, he describes *aim* as being "associated with its natural home in contexts of shooting and throwing... It suggests, first of all, the concentration of attention, and the specification of some precise objective" (Peters, 1973, p. 13).

To explicate his point more, he asks the reader to consider these two scenarios. First is that of riding a bus, which is done *in order to* get to work, or that a form is filled out *in order to* get a pair of eyeglasses. The idea here is that something is done to attain something, or that the means is actually instrumental to the achievement of the end. The second scenario is about the production of something, e.g., that flour is mixed *in order to* make a cake or steel is welded *in order to* make a bridge. In both cases, per Peters, there is specificity or concreteness in what is being aimed at. In his own words: “In both these contexts we might well ask a person what he was aiming at, what his objective was. But in both cases the answer would usually be in terms of something pretty concrete” (Peters, 1973, p. 124). Again, in both scenarios, his conception of *aim* is very much reflected here. Thereafter, he claims that ‘it is my conviction that this model misleads us in the sphere of education,’ and his support for this is that the generally accepted FAEs are neither ‘goals’ or ‘end-products,’ and that they are ‘high-sounding’ ways of viewing education because they are vague.

As Gregory Mellema observes, “what we have called [the] ultimate educational aim does not for Peters qualify as an aim; unlike getting on a bus or producing a penny out of copper, it fails to be concrete and to specify a precise objective” (Mellema, 1985, p. 326). The typical candidates of FAEs such as self-realization, character, wisdom, citizenship, or happiness are, in Peters description ‘elusive things.’ Thus, they cannot serve as aims.

The other argument Peters adds in support of his main contention is through his contrast between medicine and education. He maintains that in medicine, there is a specific end-product, that is, physical health, and that this end is clearly defined by a set of criteria such as the body possessing a certain temperature, a certain metabolic rate, etc. He also adds that there is little to no disagreement with regard to the means of attaining the end, viz., physical health. Education, however, is a different matter altogether. He claims that there is no consensus as to which is the end-product nor is there an agreement on the criteria to use in defining this product.

The following syllogisms are formalized to make clearer the argumentations and conclusions of Peters:

- i. Aims, conceptually speaking, must be concrete and specific.
The recognized FAEs are not concrete and specific.
Therefore, they cannot be considered genuine aims.
- ii. There is an enduring debate on what the proper end-product of education is.
Further, there is a persisting disagreement on what criteria to be employed in defining the end-product of education.
Therefore, there cannot be a fundamental aim of education.

The two conclusions construed from Peters' words obviously fly against the main contention of this research that *there must be a fundamental aim of education*. Any of the generally considered FAEs, if Peters' conclusions are to be embraced, cannot qualify as aims. If they cannot qualify as aims, therefore, they cannot qualify as fundamental aims of education either. Furthermore, if there really is no defined end-product in education nor is there a set of criteria to define it, then it is futile to claim that there is a fundamental aim of education. The declaration that there must be a FAE presupposes that there is definite end-product of education, and that there is an unambiguous set of criteria that defines it.

In response to (i.), it seems that Peters is impatient with the incessant debates about the nature of these FAEs, i.e., if it cannot be decided *right now* what the concrete natures of these FAEs are, then might as well leave these discourses behind. Furthermore, he seems to be discounting what philosophers prior to him have done. Thinkers of the past have grappled with the big concepts such as the *good life, happiness, knowledge, good citizen*, etc. and have adopted these as the FAEs, but what Peters is doing here is to group them together as vague, imprecise, not concrete, etc. Because of this sweeping generalization, it is just proper they ought not be recognized as having any role in education.

Gregory Mellema observes the same thing: “It is clear that Peters’ position – that they (i.e., FAEs) cannot qualify – stands in opposition to the tradition of mainstream Western philosophy. Philosophers from the time of Aristotle to the present have not hesitated to speak of ends in terms of such *generalities*... Peters appears unimpressed by this weight of tradition” (Mellema, 1985, p. 328). (And with regard to *generalities*, one characterization of an aim, especially a fundamental aim of education, is its being open-ended, and this is the property of generality that Peters is impatient about, and the one Mellema is saying that most philosophers have thought about.)

But the most obvious problem with Peters’ assertion is the seeming absence of concrete reasons. In the said work of his, he unflinchingly describes these putative FAEs as “elusive,” “not goals,” “not end-products,” and “high-sounding,” but nowhere shall the reader encounter arguments why such descriptions befit the FAEs in question. It is one thing to make a pronouncement, but another to support it with robust justifications. The latter is the one that warrants acceptability and attention, not the former. An articulation, especially a strong one, without strong reasons, is nothing but an opinion.

Someone sympathetic to Peters’ position might retort that he does not leave his articulation unsupported. This individual might say that his provided reasons that these FAEs do not qualify as genuine aims (i.), and eventually having no role in education, is that there is an incessant disagreement among philosophers and thinkers as to what constitute these, and that there is no accepted set of criteria that define them. This is Peters’ argument for (ii.). In other words, (i.) is supported by (ii.).

Nevertheless, the same thing can be said of (ii.) because nowhere will the reader find any positive and concrete argument in support of the statements ‘there is a persisting disagreement as to what constitutes these FAEs’ and ‘there is no consensus as to which set of criteria to use in defining these FAEs.’ If (i.) is supported by (ii.), but (ii.) falters argumentatively, then (i.) is said to fail as well. Suppose, however, that Peters’ argument in support of (ii.) is taken from *the fact that thinkers are still debating hitherto* as to how to conceive of these FAEs (and truly they are still contesting about them), does this fact qualify as a good support?

The problem with this is that it confuses the idea of *impossibility* with that of *difficulty*, as borrowed from philosopher of science Karl Popper. The context is this: “The Myth of the Framework is, in our time, the central bulwark of irrationalism. My counter-thesis is that it simply exaggerates a difficulty into an impossibility. The difficulty of discussion between people brought up in different frameworks is to be admitted. But nothing is more fruitful than such a discussion than the culture clash which has stimulated some of the greatest intellectual revolutions” (Popper, 1970, pp. 57-58).

In effect, Peters seems to be saying that the on-going disagreement about the constitutions of these FAEs is tantamount to the impossibility of having an agreement. *Can it not be modestly said that these persisting disagreements only show that it is ‘difficult’ to come up with a consensus, not really that it is ‘impossible’ to come up with an accord?* To reiterate what is said above, it only shows that Peters is exasperated with the ongoing exchanges and discussions about educational aims, particularly the general aims of education. Impatience is not always the answer to impossibility or absence.

Lastly, suppose that Peters’ position were accepted, that education could be practiced even without the conception of FAE, would there be unacceptable consequences? There would be. Primary among them is the unintelligibility of the manifold ideas, practices, and values being adopted in education, specifically, there would not be a way of justifying why this particular thing but not the other is included in the educative domain. But as argued above, education is an intentional endeavor, and this involves justification. For any small detail within education to make sense, to be intelligible, or to be justified, the presence of FAE must be affirmed. If not, then education in its entirety would be both an intentional enterprise yet unjustified. This is a contradiction in terms. Thus, to accept Peters’ conclusion is to result in an absurdity (*reduction ad absurdum*). Thus, the argument put forward above that there must be a fundamental aim of education remains intact, uncontested, and vigorously supported.

Another classic and explicit statement of the non-necessity of FAE is from Percy Nunn, a 20th century British educationalist, in his book *Education: Its Data and First Principles* (1947). He says: “We find... that the success of these attempts to state a universal aim for education is largely illusory, being due chiefly to the fact that every one may, within wide limits, interpret them just as he pleases (Nunn, 1947, p. 9),” and “It follows that there can be no universal aim of education if that aim is to include the assertion of any particular ideal of life; for there are as many ideals as there are persons (Nunn, 1947, p. 13).” The responses given above to R.S. Peters would apply to Nunn as well.

Conclusion

This research is an answer to a meta-question that is rarely inquired about in the area of education: *must there be a fundamental aim of education?* It is answered by borrowing a model of *epistemic justification* from the field of epistemology, and using this to argue for the necessity of FAE. Lastly, R.S. Peters’ rejoinder to this is addressed head-on. In a philosophical inquiry, proving X not only means providing *positive justifications* for X, but also rebutting possible rejoinders to X, i.e., dispelling *positive justifications* against X.

The contribution of this study in the area of philosophy of education is clearly seen in its attempt to answer a *meta-question* that is virtually non-existent in the field. The paper is not only an attempt to contribute to the literature in this inquiry and area, of which the authors think is scarce, but would act as some sort of guidance to the teachers, especially the ones on the ground, equipping them with a critical understanding of the issue discussed.

Although this is a work in philosophy of education, teachers would greatly benefit from this work, especially the emphasis on the necessity of having a fundamental aim of education. What it means is that teachers are not really expected to debate about the substantive and meta-questions surrounding FAE, but if it is really necessary that there be a FAE, teachers are cajoled to be more reflective in their practices. Suppose that X is the FAE of the Philippine basic educational system, then teachers

are expected to align their pedagogy, assessment, and usage of learning materials toward the attainment of the FAE. Practically speaking, anything that thwarts the attainment of the FAE must be reconsidered, or if the teacher is choosing between options A or B, and upon reflection it is B that more likely hits the FAE than A, then it behooves the teacher to select B over A. If the necessity of the FAE is clear to the teacher (or, if the teacher is convinced that an affirmative is the right answer to the meta-question raised in this paper), then the teacher will be more intentional in her practices, more guided in her pedagogy, more inclined toward justifications in her selection of educational options. All of these would lead to the teacher being more reflective in all instances of her practices. And such would have great benefits to the students.

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