

Chapter 6

Do Social Institutions Necessarily Suppress Individuals' Need for Autonomy? The Possibility of Schools as Autonomy-Promoting Contexts Across the Globe

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Self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes the important role that the experience of autonomy plays in a person's positive functioning and social adjustment (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Perceived autonomy is the subjective experience one feels during behavior that one's actions arise out of an internally focused, volitional sense of causality (Reeve, Nix, & Hamm, 2003). That is, the experience of autonomy is the inner endorsement of one's behavior as one's own. According to the theory, the experience of autonomy depends on the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and on the presence of environmental affordances that support these needs. While the needs for competence and relatedness have received considerable attention from other theories (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; White, 1959), SDT is unique in its emphasis on and empirical exploration of the need for autonomy. As a psychological need, autonomy is the striving to feel that one is not compelled by external or by intra-personal forces to adopt goals and enact behaviors one does not fully identify with, as well as the striving to construct, maintain, and realize goals, values, and interests which can serve as an inner compass when choices are available (Assor, 2009a, 2010).

A core empirical finding is that people function positively in a variety of important ways when environments nurture and support their need for autonomy, while they function relatively poorly in terms of those same outcomes when their surroundings frustrate their need for autonomy (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Black & Deci, 2000; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). The practical implication of this research is that the more social institutions are sensitive to and supportive of individual's need for autonomy, the better individuals in those social institutions function.

A seemingly irreconcilable conflict with the aforementioned conclusion surfaces when considering societies that characterized themselves by hierarchical values

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and structures (Kohn, 1993; Ryan & Brown, 2005; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). When societies and social institutions utilize a hierarchical structure to ensure the smooth transmission and enactment of dominant values and goals to children or employees and when that structure is paired with a carrot-and-stick approach to motivating them, then the idea of supporting or nurturing a person's need for autonomy seems out of place. For instance, in many schools, smooth functioning means (in part) that students are behaving well, acquiring valued skills, performing well on achievement tests, and graduating in a timely fashion. If schools perceive that such outcomes can best be attained by creating an authoritarian, evaluative, pressure-inducing, and high-stakes social context, then sacrificing students' need for autonomy is often viewed as a necessary side effect of such practices. Some school administrators even prioritize the use of shame-based motivators (publically and critically comparing one school to another) and threats of sanctions as the means to attain their desired outcomes (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). The theme that runs throughout this chapter is that this is a problem, and it is a problem because empirical research shows that neglecting or discounting the importance of students' need for autonomy is an administrative and curricular blunder—and this is true in the classroom (Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon, & Roth, 2005), at the level of the school (Kohn, 2000), and at the level of the culture more generally (Ryan & La Guardia, 1999).

This same conflict between sacrificing individuals' needs in favor of institutional goals plays itself out across a range of institutional settings, including the family, businesses, corporations, the military, religious institutions, sports teams, health care settings, governmental agencies, and so forth. While the present paper does examine social institutions in general, its specific focus will be on the social institution of the school—and on addressing the following five questions in particular:

- What makes a social institution controlling?
- Do social institutions necessarily need to be controlling?
- Can hierarchical social institutions be both smooth functioning and noncontrolling? Can they be both smooth functioning and autonomy-promoting?
- What would an autonomy-promoting school look like?
- Are autonomy-promoting schools cross-culturally feasible?

The present paper concerns the role that culturally embedded social institutions play in nurturing versus suppressing individuals' need for autonomy. Implied within the first half of the paper's title is the idea that social institutions often function in ways that suppress individuals' need for autonomy. The question of how and why social institutions pursue their goals in autonomy-suppressing ways occupies the first half of the chapter. Implied in the second half of the paper's title is the idea that social institutions—and schools in particular—can pursue societal goals in ways that support and even nurture the individual's need for autonomy. The question of how and why schools might function as autonomy-promoting cultural institutions occupies the second half of the chapter.

What Makes a Social Institution Controlling?

What makes any entity—an individual, a school, a government, an organization, a corporation, or a culture—controlling is that it intrudes into people’s naturally occurring ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving to pressure them to change what they think, feel, or do, and it does so without respecting and considering their concerns or reasons for doing so. For instance, a teacher acts in a controlling way when she tells a student to quit procrastinating and complete her assignment immediately without asking why the student is having trouble finishing the project in the first place. Teachers vary in how controlling they are (Reeve, 2009), parents vary in how controlling they are (Grolnick, 2009), schools vary in how controlling they are (Moss, 2010), and it is also probably true that whole nations vary in how controlling they are (though we are not aware of such comparative data).

What are the attributes which make institutions or people controlling? First, a controlling entity adopts only its own perspective without considering or being sensitive to the perspective of others. This means that the controlling entity prioritizes its own needs and concerns over those of individuals, sometimes grossly so. Second, the controlling entity utilizes insensitive and disrespectful influence attempts to change the individual’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors into something prescribed by the social institution as more acceptable. This means that, rather than allowing individuals to have thoughts, feelings, and actions of their own, the controlling entity tells individuals what is right or what is desirable in terms of what to think, feel, or do. Further, a controlling entity applies pressure until individuals relent and change the way they think, feel, or behave (to be consistent with those of the institution’s).

Research has explored why people adopt a controlling style toward others—that is, why any one person or any one representative of a social institution might adopt only his or her own perspective and why he or she might enact insensitive and disrespectful influence attempts (Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger, & Sauck, 2007; Pelletier & Sharp, 2009; Pelletier, Seguin-Levesque, & Legault, 2002; Reeve, 2009; Taylor, Ntoumanis, & Smith, 2009). Essentially, a controlling style becomes increasingly probable when people are subjected to pressures from above, pressures from below, and pressures from within (to borrow a framework first introduced by Pelletier and colleagues, 2002).

In the case of teachers, *pressures from above* include those from school administrators who impose demands such as time constraints (cover curricular material in a specific time), impose performance evaluations, pressure teachers to conform to certain teaching methods, and make teachers accountable and responsible for their students’ level of performance (Pelletier & Sharp, 2009; Pelletier et al., 2002). Such pressures can originate from school administrators, but they can also originate from colleagues, departmental chairs, school boards, state legislators, and parents that demand results. *Pressures from below* include teachers’ reactions to students’ poor-quality motivation, lackluster performance, or irresponsible self-regulation (Pelletier et al., 2002). That is, teachers tend to adapt their motivating style according to their perceptions of the autonomous quality

of students' motivation (i.e., they tend to become more controlling when they believe students have poor quality motivation; Pelletier & Vallerand, 1996). Finally, *pressures from within* include those that arise from within a teacher's own personality, values, and beliefs about motivation. When teachers themselves possess controlled motivations, are authoritarian and highly conservative, embrace a control causality orientation, and see utility in controlling motivational strategies (rewards, pressuring-inducing language), they tend to relate to students in controlling ways (Boggiano, Barrett, Weiher, McClelland, & Lusk, 1987; Nachtsheim & Hoy, 1976; Reeve, 1998; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). This trichotomous framework explains why any one particular person adopts a controlling style toward others, but the question pursued in the present paper asks why an entire social institution (or even nation) tends to adopt a controlling style.

Do Social Institutions Necessarily Need to Be Controlling?

To understand the enactment of a controlling style at an institutional level, additional sources of influence need to be added to the trichotomous framework offered above, influences that explain how behavior arises from and reflects social norms as much as it might arise from and reflect personal attitudes. To provide such a framework, we apply the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1988, 1991), as illustrated graphically in Fig. 6.1.

The TPB seeks to explain people's intentions to engage in a particular behavior and their actual engagement (or not) in that behavior—for instance, whether people intend to vote or exercise or quit smoking and then also whether they actually vote, engage in exercise, or quit smoking. In the TPB, behavior is mostly determined by the person's intentions to engage in the behavior, and intentions are determined by three sources. First, as shown in the three bold boxes in the center of Fig. 6.1, intentions are predicted by the ease of performing that course of action (perceived behavioral control), and that sense of ease is largely a function of how easy versus difficult the successful performance on the behavior is likely to be (e.g., one's intention to quit smoking will be low if quitting is perceived to be a very difficult thing to do). Second, intentions are predicted by the person's attitude toward the course of action (positive attitude), and attitudes in the TPB are essentially the person's beliefs about the value, importance, and enjoyment of the behavior (e.g., one's intention to quit smoking will be low if the person really likes smoking). Third, intentions are predicted by the person's perceptions of the social norms governing the behavior (subjective norm), and subjective norms involve the person's sense of the social pressure and the behavioral expectations of others that guide one in the direction of behaving in a particular way (e.g., one's intention to quit smoking will be high if the person perceives that smoking cessation is something important others expect him or her to do).

In trying to understand why a person (or people working within a social institution more specifically) might adopt an autonomy-supportive motivating style, we

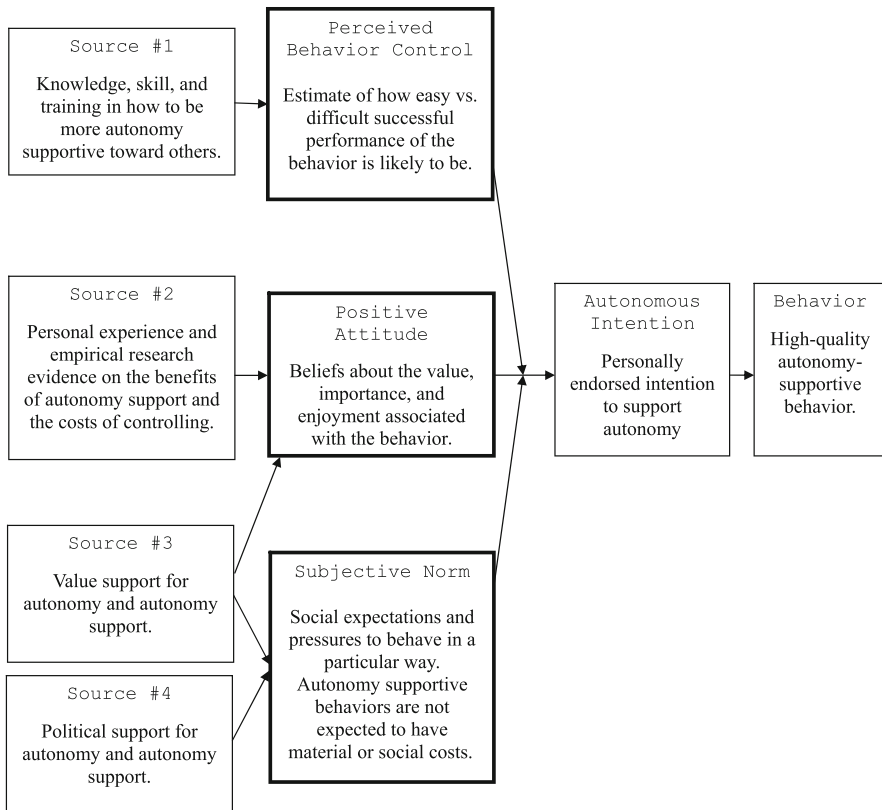


Fig. 6.1 (Modified) Theory of planned behavior to predict how likely it is that individuals will engage in autonomy-supportive behaviors

argue that the likelihood that a person will endorse the intention to act in highly autonomy-supportive ways toward others depends on (1) revising his or her expectation away from the idea that supporting autonomy is difficult and toward the idea that it is a relatively easy thing to do, (2) enhancing his or her positive attitude toward autonomy support (enhancing its perceived value, importance, and enjoyment), and (3) embedding the person's daily experience within a culture that makes autonomy support normative, expected, and unassociated with social costs (see Fig. 6.1).

Enhancing perceived behavioral control: Intervention training to learn how to support autonomy (source #1). In general, teachers rate an autonomy-supportive approach to instruction as a harder thing to do than they rate a controlling approach to instruction (Reeve et al., 2010). That is, teachers think that controlling others is relatively easy, while supporting autonomy is relatively hard. Put another way, teachers generally believe that taking students' perspectives, vitalizing their inner

motivational resources, communicating with noncontrolling language, and acknowledging and accepting students' negative affect during instruction is more difficult than is simply telling students what to do and making sure they do it (i.e., a controlling style). While it is not clear if autonomy support is objectively a more difficult-to-apply approach to instruction, it does appear that teachers believe this to be true. Hence, if teachers could gain knowledge, skill, and training in how to be more autonomy-supportive toward students, then they might develop a greater intention to enact an autonomy-supportive style during instruction. Recognizing this, a meta-analysis of 20 independent, experimentally designed training intervention programs showed that teachers (and parents, coaches, workplace managers, physicians, and others) can learn how to be more autonomy-supportive (average effect size for the training intervention, $d = 0.63$; Su & Reeve, in press). That is, with training, autonomy support becomes easier to do (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Barch, & Jeon, 2004). Thus, one path to help people in organizations adopt a more autonomy-supportive style would be to provide them with effective intervention training in how to do so (to enhance perceived behavioral control; Fig. 6.1).

Enhancing positive attitude: Learning the benefits of autonomy support (source #2). Empirical research affirms the validity of the conclusion that people benefit from autonomy support but suffer from behavioral control (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These benefits have been shown to be meaningful and wide spread, as support for autonomy has been shown to causally increase others' *motivation* (intrinsic motivation, perceived autonomy, perceived competence), *engagement* (effort, persistence, class participation, class attendance), *development* (self-worth, creativity), *learning* (deep processing of information, conceptual understanding, self-regulation strategies), *performance* (grades, standardized test scores), and *psychological well being* (vitality, positive affect, school satisfaction), as reviewed in Reeve (2009). As people learn of the benefits of autonomy support, they tend to adopt a significantly more positive attitude toward the practice (Reeve, 1998). Thus, a second path to help people in organizations adopt a more autonomy-supportive style would be to expose them to the wealth of evidence supporting the conclusion that people benefit from autonomy support but suffer from behavioral control (to enhance a favorable attitude; Fig. 6.1).

Enhancing subjective norm: Value support for autonomy (source #3). The values embraced by institutions and cultures influence individuals' capacity to satisfy their need for autonomy in their daily decisions and behaviors. In particular, when people rate the culture they live in as a relatively hierarchical one, they are less likely to feel that a subjective norm for autonomy-supportive social interactions exists within their culture and they are also less likely to feel autonomy in their daily lives (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004). Hence, social institutions that value hierarchy and social stratification pose a normative obstacle to its individual members' capacity to act in autonomy-supportive ways (Ryan & Sapp, 2007). On a more positive note, Downie, Koestner, and Chua (2007) showed that citizens in countries that embraced values supportive of autonomy relatively flourished and thrived (e.g., in terms of subjective and physical well-being),

relative to citizens in countries that embraced values supportive of control. Thus, a third path to help people in organizations adopt a more autonomy-supportive style would be to move toward egalitarian values and therefore make autonomy support a socially valued thing to do (to enhance subjective norm; Fig. 6.1).

Enhancing subjective norm: Political support for autonomy (source #4). Political support for autonomy support has not been extensively studied in the SDT literature, but the research that has been done examined political support at the national level (Downie et al., 2007). National political support for autonomy is evidenced in societies rich in civil liberties and individual rights—that is, those that have governments that are accountable to the people, prioritize equality between individuals, apply the rule of law equally to all citizens, and enable citizens to exercise their right to vote in fair democratic elections. Downie and colleagues showed rather impressively that citizens in countries that provided high political support for daily autonomy relatively flourished and thrived (e.g., in terms of citizens' subjective and physical well-being) relative to citizens in countries that provide them with little or no political support for their autonomy. Thus, a fourth path to help people in organizations adopt a more autonomy-supportive style would be to surround them with a culture that highlighted the social importance of autonomy support and reduced fears that it might produce social or material costs (to enhance subjective norm; Fig. 6.1).

Hierarchical values and social structure. The common denominator underlying value- and politically-oriented influences on subjective norms for autonomy versus control is the concept of hierarchy (versus egalitarianism). Hierarchical organizations make salient and emphasize the legitimacy of authority, roles, social stratification, and unequal allocation of resources (Schwartz, 1994).

Nations can be scored and even rank ordered in terms of the hierarchical values its citizens embrace and depend upon for the culture's smooth functioning (Schwartz, 1994). It makes sense to extend this idea to propose that social institutions might similarly be scored and rank ordered on the extent to which they are hierarchical and dependent on such a structure for their smooth functioning. For instance, social institutions that would likely score as highly hierarchical (in most nations) would be prisons, the military, courts, and corporations, because organizational outcomes such as safety, the rule of law, and the bottom line (profit) are typically prioritized over the concerns and needs of the individuals in those organizations. Social institutions that would likely score as relatively more egalitarian (i.e., less hierarchical) might be hospitals, public services, and schools, as these social institutions generally value and serve the needs of both society and individuals in roughly equal weightings.

The basis for scoring a nation as hierarchical versus egalitarian is the value system that is internalized and endorsed by members of that nation, values that are rooted in the nation's historical, political, religious, and economic (e.g., seniority system) traditions. For a social institution, the basis for determining whether it is largely hierarchical or egalitarian is likely rooted in the purposes for which the social institution was created and continues to be maintained. Prisons are highly hierarchical because their chief function is to maintain order and protect public safety.

Individual rights of inmates are necessarily sacrificed to ensure that the valued institutional mission is accomplished. Of course, prisons could also serve the needs of inmates, as through the offering of educational and job-promotion programs, but the point here is that, generally speaking, hierarchical organizations prioritize institutional goals over individual goals and, in their day to day practice, view sacrificing the individual's concerns as acceptable if doing so helps them achieve their sought-after outcomes.

Can Hierarchical Social Institutions Be Both Smooth Functioning and Noncontrolling?

Social institutions have goals, priorities, and mission statements and they often use a hierarchical structure to make sure they realize their goals with minimum resistance and conflict. In that sense, then, hierarchical structures sometimes enhance smooth, conflict-free functioning that is consistent with the organization's goals. In many ways, the mere presence of a social hierarchy orients social interactants toward a controlling pattern of interaction that reflects influence, power, and control (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007). Hence, social hierarchies often achieve their smooth, conflict-free functioning through patterns of interaction that include controlling individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as a central element. Still, while a controlling hierarchical structure might yield smooth functioning, it nevertheless carries crucial risks to individuals' autonomy, development, and psychological well-being that simply cannot be ignored. So, a crucial question to ask is whether or not hierarchical social institutions can be smooth functioning and noncontrolling at the same time.

Hierarchical social institutions can certainly be smooth functioning. That is, by placing people into roles and by giving some roles the authority and legitimacy to tell others what to do, then social institutions can make progress toward realizing their goals and solving their problems. As an example, a school might want greater conformity from students and institute a dress code policy as a means toward that goal. The school would then give teachers the power to deliver rewards and sanctions to compliant and non-compliant students. The policy and its enforcement might very well yield smooth functioning and a lack of overt resistance to the extent that all students dress in a way that is desirable to the school authorities. But the crucial question is whether or not the social institution—the school, in this case—necessarily needs to be controlling to function in a harmonious way? That is, do hierarchical social institutions necessarily have to pursue their goals and solve their problems in ways that neglect or discount individuals' perspective and voice and do they necessarily have to pursue their goals and solve their problems in ways that are insensitive and disrespectful to individuals' needs and preferences? For a social institution (such as the school) to place individuals' perspective and ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving at the same level of importance as its own likely means it runs the risk of losing its capacity for smooth functioning, at least from the point of view of the social institution.

One contribution this chapter seeks to make is to show how schools can be structured to value and to meet the needs of both society and individuals. The provision of a structured learning environment is essential to meeting the needs, goals, and purposes of schools (e.g., preparing a skilled workforce, promoting the internalization of cultural values), and it is largely through the provision of structure that students become aware of what the social institution (the school) expects of them. The problem with structure, however, is that in many cases it is confused and used interchangeably with coercive control. Control involves demands, insinuations, sanctions, and rigid rules; structure does not necessarily involve these components.

Classroom research shows that teacher-provided structure and teacher-provided autonomy support both contribute constructively to positive student outcomes, such as students' greater classroom engagement (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010) and students' greater capacity for self-regulated learning (Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens, & Dochy, 2009). The conclusion is that the optimal learning environment for students is one that tends to be both structured and noncontrolling. This is so, because structure (formulating [with students' participation and input] clear goals, communicating reasonable expectations, providing guidance, offering feedback) is essential to meeting the needs, goals, and priorities of the school as well as for supporting students' sense of increased competence in mastering important skills and knowledge, while noncontrolling means that the structure is implemented in ways that value the students' perspectives and respect their concerns, needs, and preferences. So, potentially, hierarchical social institutions could be smooth functioning, harmonious, and noncontrolling. But, noncontrolling is not the same as autonomy supportive, a crucial distinction that leads us to ask whether hierarchical social institutions can be both smooth-functioning and autonomy supportive?

Can Hierarchical Schools Be Truly Autonomy Supportive?

Autonomy support means taking the perspective of the individual, welcoming and inviting individuals' thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions, and supporting individuals' personal development and capacity for autonomous self-regulation (Reeve, 2009). In practice, autonomy support means creating (1) a structure and an atmosphere that affords choice and supports students as they formulate their inner compass—namely, direction-giving goals, values, and interests (Assor, 2009a, 2010), and (2) classroom conditions that allow students to experience autonomy (Reeve, 2006).

From this understanding of what it means to be autonomy supportive, it is apparent that hierarchical social institutions are structured in ways that work incompatibly against the offering of an environment that is deeply autonomy supportive. That is, by definition, hierarchical social institutions prioritize institutional (or societal) goals, needs, and perspective over individuals' goals, needs, and perspective. Also, by definition, autonomy-supportive environments take the individual's perspective,

deeply value and honor that perspective, create opportunities to experience autonomy during action, and create opportunities for students to develop goals, values, and interests which they experience as authentic. This emphasis on the development of an authentic inner compass is a logical opposite to finding one's dutiful place within an imposed hierarchy.

The incompatibility between a hierarchical structure and full autonomy support increases when the hierarchical organization attempts to promote and transmit extrinsic values such as prestige, competitiveness, wealth, or risking your health in an attempt to abide by social conventions. According to SDT, such values do not really help to satisfy basic psychological needs and often make it more difficult to reach meaningful satisfaction of these needs. As a result, any institutional attempt to promote extrinsic values is likely to be experienced as controlling.

While the support of students' basic needs requires considerable material, emotional, and intellectual resources, schools can meet this demanding challenge. Autonomy-promoting schools would characterize themselves by two key features. First, they would be designed in ways that nurtured and satisfied students' need for autonomy. Second, they would offer frequently recurring opportunities for students to experience autonomy during learning activities.

What Would an Autonomy-Promoting School Look Like?

It Would Be Designed to Satisfy Students' Psychological Need for Autonomy

As discussed, the need for autonomy refers to a striving (a) to be able to choose and not be controlled, and (b) to formulate and realize values, goals, and interests which feel authentic and serve as an inner compass in one's life, thus providing inner criteria for making important decisions (when they are allowed to decide). It should be noted that direction-giving goals, values, and interests also provide people with internal criteria for evaluating others and themselves, provide a basis for feeling that one's actions are coherent and meaningful, and make one less dependent on others' evaluations (Assor, 2009a, 2010). SDT-based research has devoted considerable attention to school and classroom features which support students' striving for choice and lack of coercion (e.g., Assor et al., 2002; Reeve & Jang, 2006). However, the second propensity constituting the need for autonomy—the striving to form an inner compass—has received only little attention to date. Yet, there is some research on teacher and parent behaviors that do support the formation of authentic, direction-giving values, goals, and interests. After briefly surveying this research, we will describe the characteristics of schools supporting the formation of an authentic inner compass in students, based both on the surveyed research and on the larger educational literature.

Recent research by the Ben Gurion University motivation group (Assor, 2009b, 2010; Kanat-Maymon & Assor, 2010) suggests that there are two types of educators'

behaviors which can support the formation of direction-giving values and goals. The first is educators' support of reflective value/goal exploration (SVE). SVE refers to discussions and activities that enable students to examine the extent to which they see various goals and values as worthy, desirable, and personally meaningful. The second is educators' support of the formation of integrated values, termed "Fostering inner directed valuing processes" (FIV), a construct with three components: helping students calm down before they have to make serious decisions, encouraging the examination of one's values and goals when faced with a difficult decision or external pressures, and encouraging the consideration of alternatives and relevant information before making a decision.

FIV differs from SVE in that it is a socializing practice that is used only when the child faces difficult decisions and social pressures and, unlike SVE, it provides a certain "training" in authentic and rational decision making under stress. In contrast, SVE refers to general encouragement of reflective discussion. FIV is hypothesized to contribute to the formation of integrated values and goals because it helps youth develop the capacity to withstand the difficulties involved in value exploration. Thus, youth who have often engaged in inner-directed valuing are assumed to develop skills and tendencies that would enable them to seriously examine their own thoughts, ideals, and inner feelings when they determine their important goals and form commitments.

Adolescents' perceptions of their parents as high on FIV predict identity-exploration and the formation of commitments that are experienced as autonomous (Assor, 2010; Assor, Eilat, & Roth, 2009). Moreover, FIV also predicts adolescents' capacity to experience anger and anxiety without losing control or immediately suppressing these feelings, as well as their tendency to try to understand the sources of these feelings and their implications for one's life and relationships.

Like parents, teachers too can support and guide youth's reflective value formation (Assor, 2010; Kanat-Maymon & Assor, 2010). For example, Kanat-Maymon and Assor (2010) showed, in three studies, that when teachers encourage students to openly discuss and explore values and goals, students engage in school activities with a strong sense of autonomy and volition, and they also report feeling well and vital. Importantly, these studies also suggest that teachers' SVE promotes not only students' sense of autonomy but students' engagement and grades as well. Thus, support for value and goal exploration might also have a salutary effect on positive academic functioning and in this way might be consistent with the goals of many hierarchical societies and schools.

The importance of SVE was demonstrated in research on modern-orthodox Jewish religious families who encourage open dialogue and reflection on religious principles. Thus, youth growing up in these families report feeling a higher level of integrated religious motivation, perceived autonomy, purpose, and well-being, relative to youth growing in families not supporting reflection and dialogue on religious principles (Assor, Cohen-Melayev, Kaplan, & Friedman, 2005).

The research surveyed makes it clear that schools aspiring to support the need for autonomy should do more than allow choice and avoid controlling teaching methods. Additionally, it appears important to foster students' capacity and inclination

to engage in inner valuing (FIV), as well as create regular opportunities which support reflective discussion and exploration of goals and values (SVE). Therefore, these two inter-related supports for authentic value and goal formation constitute an essential element of the autonomy-promoting school. However, FIV and SVE might not be enough to support students' need for autonomy. To enable students to feel that they can truly have choice and influence on their life in school and to support the formation of authentic interests and values, additional school attributes are needed. Below is a brief description of six attributes of an autonomy-promoting school to supplement FIV and SVE.

(1) *Each teacher is responsible for a small number of students with whom he or she has regularly scheduled dialogues.* The first and perhaps most important feature of an autonomy-promoting school is the role-definition of teachers as *growth-promoting allies* who maintain regular dialogues with students. This role definition is not only one of the defining principles of the school, but more importantly, it is shared and internalized by the teachers, and the school further offers organizational supports, procedures, and regular in-service training to help teachers function and develop as growth-promoting allies. The growth-promoting teacher strives, and is expected, to create relationships with students which help them feel that the teacher is really interested in their growth and basic needs. This is facilitated by regularly scheduled and on-going teacher–student dialogues.

To become high-quality growth-promoting allies and to be able to conduct effective growth-promoting dialogues, most teachers have to go through training and consultation meetings to develop their skills and capacities in this domain. These meetings are most effective when they occur on a regular basis in small groups in which teachers can share their difficulties, clarify professional dilemmas, and plan ahead in a secure and accepting atmosphere that provides emotional and professional support (Assor, Kaplan, Feinberg, & Tal, 2009; Feinberg, Kaplan, Assor, & Kanat-Maymon, 2008; Kaplan & Assor, 2010). Such in-service support allows teachers the training they need to become growth-promoting allies in that they, first, decrease their own controlling behaviors, school violence decreases, and peer-to-peer caring increases (Feinberg et al., 2008); second, enhance their capacities to enact dialogue capable of enhancing students' positive affect and perceptions that their studies have relevance for students' lives and suppress violence in school (Kaplan & Assor, 2010), and; third, pave the way for these teachers to find greater fulfillment and satisfaction in the profession and to understand students better and in ways that foster closer and less tense relationships (Assor, 2010; Feinberg et al., 2008).

While the above programs do not directly focus on teachers' ability to support the development of students' values, goals, and interests, it appears that the establishment of empathic, respectful, and trusting relations between teachers and students is a necessary foundation for teachers' ability to foster inner valuing processes and value and interest exploration in students. The next five attributes more directly support students' strivings for choice and for value and interest formation.

(2) *Students have considerable influence and responsibility (democratic participation)*. This feature refers to schools as democratic institutions in which students take part as citizens who have considerable influence as well as responsibility. Models of such schools and classrooms appear in Rogers and Freiberg (1994), Freiberg (1996) and also in Kohlberg's (1981) *Just Community* approach to moral development. This attribute refers to an organizational structure in which students are true partners in the determination of discipline laws, budget allocations, and even the selection of learning contents, knowledge objectives, and assessment procedures. It is assumed that adults' willingness to give students such influence and responsibility causes students to feel that their need for choice and their competence and inherent goodness are deeply respected. Moreover, the opportunity to participate in the determination of various objectives, in making highly consequential decisions, and the democratic deliberation procedures leading to various decisions enable students to reflect on various goals, values, and moral principles and then internalize them as integrated personal values and goals.

(3) *Foster the development of individual interests*. To allow the formation of individual interests, the autonomy-promoting school would allocate considerable time and resources to activities in which students' explore various domains of potential interest and then, with help and instruction from relevant people inside and outside of the school, they try to develop competence and skills which would enable them to develop enduring intrinsic interest in the domain they found to be satisfying and personally meaningful. Educational psychologists offer excellent insights into what relevant activities and structures help students develop individual interests (e.g., Hidi & Renninger, 2006). This feature of the autonomy-promoting school becomes increasingly important as students mature, so that in high school it can be expected to occupy a significant portion of the time students spend in school and after school.

(4) *Support exploration of and open reflection on important social and moral identity-defining values and issues (SVE)*. Post-modern societies and the information age are characterized by moral relativism, abundance of contradictory opinions, a huge volume of information, and the availability (or apparent availability) of many choice options in terms of life styles, world views, and careers. These circumstances, and particularly the absence of widely accepted authorities, make it especially difficult for youth to develop clear goals and values that are authentic and reflection based. To enable youth to develop such values and goals, it is important that schools institute regular activities and discussions in which youth are able to discuss their views on important social and moral issues. Such discussions should, of course, be carried out in an atmosphere that is accepting and tolerant to different views. Moreover, as part of such discussions, teachers should encourage skills and routines that foster inner directed valuing processes (FIV). Thus, before students arrive at a certain decision or make a commitment to some course of action (for example, volunteering), teachers should help students feel that it is okay to take the time to calm down, stay with the ambiguity for a while, avoid doing things as a result of social pressure, and examine why they really want to make the commitment. While

FIV can start in kindergarten, support for value exploration (SVE) likely becomes most important in adolescence.

(5) *Pro-social activities that are satisfying and choiceful.* In almost all societies children and youth are expected to internalize and enact pro-social and altruistic values, such as helping the needy, caring for others, and showing social involvement. Because such pro-social actions are not necessarily pleasant and often entail significant personal costs, authentic and deep internalization of such values is difficult to attain. Autonomy-promoting schools may therefore need to institute specific activities and structures that would allow students to discover the satisfactions that can be derived from meaningful pro-social action and social involvement. It is assumed that if students have satisfying experiences during these activities (e.g., while helping younger students in school, visiting the elderly, volunteering with a community organization), then they are likely to internalize the importance of pro-social activities and goals as an important aspect of their self and identity.

While youth identity includes interests, values, and goals other than pro-social goals and values, there is a good reason to believe that pro-social and moral values may be an especially important component of a healthy identity in post-modern societies, perhaps even form *the unshakeable core of one's inner compass*. These direction-giving goals and values may be a crucial source of a sense of autonomy and therefore vitality. They also are highly important across cultures, yield consistent psycho-social benefits, and appear to have at least a partly organismic (perhaps even evolutionary) foundation (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). However, to increase the likelihood that pro-social activities will be satisfying and meaningful, it is important to create a school structure that allows pro-social activities to be experienced as need satisfying. That is, students need to feel that when they engage in helping or volunteering, their needs for choice and a lack of coercion, for competence, and for relatedness are being met. To insure such need satisfaction, it is important to allow students to choose the activities they engage in, and it is essential to provide guidance and support to help students cope with various difficulties in their pro-social activities. Thus, schools who would like to help students develop authentic pro-social goals and commitments cannot simply urge their students to get involved in pro-social activities. Rather, they can provide a structure that would insure that these involvements are need satisfying and therefore contribute constructively to the formation of authentic, direction-giving, pro-social goals and values.

(6) *Reduce the amount of information students are tested on and the frequency of comparative achievement tests.* Considerable research has shown that tests producing scores that allow students, teachers, and schools to be compared increase tension, create ego-involvement, and focus attention on ability demonstration rather than on ability improvement. Moreover, when schools and teachers have to demonstrate success in mastering great amounts of information they cannot devote sufficient time to participatory democratic procedures (including time-consuming discussions of conduct problems and rule violations), to regular teacher–student dialogues, to supervised pro-social activities, and to activities fostering the development of inner valuing, values, and interests.

Importantly, numerous educators have emphasized that in the information age, there is little sense in trying to transmit to children great amounts of information (including very specific mathematical or scientific procedures and detailed information in the social and biological sciences on which students are often tested). Rather, it is more important to develop basic language and math knowledge, skills allowing effective knowledge search and organization, and skills allowing logical and critical thinking. It therefore appears that schools can reduce the amount of information they test on and the frequency of comparative tests without harming their students' future ability to master difficult academic challenges or to obtain high-tech jobs.

When considering these attributes of autonomy-promoting schools, it is important *not* to view them simply as a list of separate components from which one can randomly pick. Rather, the first two components and the last one (regular teacher–student growth-promoting dialogues, students' influence on major aspects of school life, and reducing the amount of information to be tested on) appear to provide a necessary foundation which cannot be discarded. Components 3–5 then contribute to the construction of an authentic inner compass that includes goals, values, and interests.

What Would an Autonomy-Promoting School Look Like?

It Would Create Frequently Recurring Opportunities for Students to Experience Autonomy During Learning Activities

While the first key feature of autonomy-promoting schools is that they nurture and satisfy students' *need for autonomy*, the second is that they create ongoing opportunities for *autonomy experiences* during learning activities. Empirical, classroom-based research has identified four sets of teaching behaviors that reliably allow students to feel highly autonomous during learning activities: nurture inner motivational resources, rely on noncontrolling and informational language, display patience to allow for self-paced learning and personal development to occur, and acknowledge and accept expressions of negative feelings. Each of these four ways of relating to students will be discussed in the paragraphs below, but it is worth pointing out here that autonomy-supportive instructional behaviors (including those that extend beyond the four highlighted here) are simply those which effectively promote the subjective experience of autonomy—that is, feeling like an origin, engaging oneself in volitional action, experiencing a sense of choice, and learning to trust an inner voice.

(1) *Nurture inner motivational resources.* The first quality that makes a school autonomy-promoting is that it nurtures students' inner motivational resources during instruction. An autonomy-supportive approach to instruction rests on the assumption that students possess inner motivational resources that are fully capable of

energizing and directing their classroom activity in productive ways. Autonomy-promoting schools therefore strive to first gain awareness of what inner motivational resources students possess and then second find or create opportunities to nurture and develop those resources (Reeve & Halusic, 2009). What is meant by the term *inner motivational resources* are vitalizing sources of motivation such as intrinsic motivation, interests, self-set (intrinsic) goals, inner-directed valuing, among others (see Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). The fundamental importance of nurturing inner motivational resources during instruction becomes most obvious when teachers introduce a new learning activity and request that students engage themselves in it. To spark vitalized engagement, autonomy-promoting schools consistency involve and nurture students' inner resources that are too often latent (not activated) in students' classroom experiences, while controlling schools tend to just tell students what to do and then use extrinsic motivators and controlling language to make sure they do it. For instance, to vitalize an autonomy-rich learning experience, the teacher might begin the lesson by asking a curiosity-inducing question (e.g., "Where did the moon come from?"), pose an optimal challenge (e.g., "Here is a problem; see if you can figure it out."), or communicate that the learning activity represents an opportunity to make progress toward an intrinsic goal (e.g., to become a good writer), rather than artificially manufacture student initiative by telling them to obey a directive, fulfill a request, or earn extra credit points.

(2) *Rely on noncontrolling and informational language.* The second quality that makes a school autonomy-promoting is that it avoids controlling language and policies and, instead, relies on language and policies that are highly informational. Schools and classrooms invariably have rules, procedures, behavioral requests, and learning activities that are not inherently interesting and need-satisfying things for students to do. This creates a motivational problem for students who understandably have a difficult time generating the motivation they need to undertake such unappealing endeavors. To support students' volitional engagement in uninteresting (but important) activities, autonomy-promoting schools provide explanatory rationales that articulate clearly why the requested behavior is truly worth their effort, and they make a special effort to provide such rationales when choice is constrained or uninteresting endeavors are necessary. Such schools also frame unappealing requests and lessons (e.g., "You need to revise your paper again") within the context of pursuing and attaining intrinsic goals ("because it will help you become the writer you want to become"). What autonomy-promoting schools do not do (that controlling school do) is verbally push and pressure students toward predetermined answers, solutions, and desired behaviors through rigid, evaluative, and pressure-inducing communications, such as by uttering commands and directives (Assor et al., 2005), inducing feelings of shame, guilt, or anxiety (Ryan, 1982), cultivating perfectionistic standards and self-representations (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Luyten, & Goossens, 2005), or by offering "conditional regard" more generally (Assor et al., 2004).

(3) *Display patience to allow time for self-paced learning and personal development to occur.* The third quality that makes a school autonomy-promoting is that it allows students the time and space they need for self-paced learning and personal development to occur. Learning and personal development take time, as a

student who is trying to make sense of a learning activity or to understand and resolve a personal issue needs both time and opportunity to explore and manipulate materials and ideas, make plans, formulate and test hypotheses, evaluate evidence and feedback, adjust problem-solving strategies, monitor the progress they are making, revise their work, re-evaluate their goals, and so forth. In contrast, controlling schools short-cut this learning process (or even by-pass it altogether) and, instead, simply tell students answers and solutions before they have a chance to figure them out for themselves, as if the outcome was more important than the learning itself. So, instead of telling and showing students right answers and desired behaviors, a teacher in an autonomy-promoting school would take the time to listen, provide encouragement for initiative and effort, provide time and opportunities for students to work in their own way, offer helpful hints when students seem stuck, and postpone advice until they first understand the students' goals and perspective, though they also provide expectations, guidance, scaffolding, and feedback (i.e., structure) when it is needed and invited (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

(4) *Acknowledge and accept expressions of negative feelings.* The fourth quality that makes a school autonomy promoting is that it adopts the students' perspective to acknowledge and accept negative feelings and expressions of resistance. Students are bound to encounter motivational and behavioral problems in schools because schools necessarily have rules, requirements, and agendas that are sometimes at odds with their preferences and natural inclinations. The typical controlling reaction to student problems such as listlessness, complaining, whining, sloppy work, and irresponsible behavior is to counter students' negative affect and problematic behavior with power assertions designed to suppress these criticisms and complaints, or turn them into something more acceptable to the teacher (e.g., "quit your complaining and pay attention"; Assor et al., 2005). Such a reaction leaves students with the impression that the teacher is insensitive to their concerns. In contrast, autonomy-promoting schools acknowledge and accept such expressions of negative feelings in a way that students get the impression that the teacher understands that they are struggling and are in need of assistance and support. Acknowledging and accepting students' expressions of negative affect as a potentially valid reaction to an imposed rule or requirement is not about being permissive or relinquishing a teacher's authority. Rather, it is about giving students a voice and understanding their perspective. More proactively, it also means soliciting students' opinions, allowing (even encouraging) students to voice their preferences and opinions, and basically being more tolerant and appreciative of students' autonomy (Assor et al., 2005).

Are Autonomy-Promoting Schools Cross-Culturally Feasible?

So far, we have taken the position that schools can function as autonomy-promoting social institutions. We have further argued that we know what autonomy-promoting schools can look like in practice. We now turn to the question of whether autonomy-promoting schools are cross-culturally feasible. That is, autonomy-promoting schools might work in the United States and Canada, but will they work in Brazil

(Chirkov, Ryan, & Willness, 2005), Bulgaria (Deci et al., 2001), Korea (Jang et al., 2009), or China (Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005)?

To explain when people in social institutions (e.g., teachers in schools) enact autonomy-supportive or controlling behavior toward others, we offered Fig. 6.1, based loosely (but not directly) on the theory of planned behavior. In this theory, weights (weighted influence) are assigned to the three sources of influence—perceived behavioral control, personal attitude, and subjective norm. The magnitude of the weights is determined by the particulars of the behavior (e.g., how easy versus hard it is to do), the person's evaluation of that behavior (e.g., how valuable or enjoyable it has proven itself to be in the past), and the situational constraints and social forces operative when enacting the behavior (e.g., flexibility or inflexibility of school administrators).

In egalitarian countries where social norms expect and encourage autonomy and autonomy support, relatively little cultural press to enact a controlling motivating style is likely to exist. That is, in egalitarian countries, the subjective norm to engage in controlling behaviors is not likely to be a dominating behavioral influence. Hence, whether a school creates an autonomy-supportive climate for its students depends largely on how valuable teachers believe autonomy support to be (positive attitude) and how efficacious they perceive themselves to be when trying to teach in autonomy-supportive ways (perceived behavioral control). Such attitudes and perceptions of control can be (and have been) supported by professional developmental opportunities, as discussed earlier. This means that autonomy-promoting schools are quite feasible in egalitarian countries.

In hierarchical countries where social norms neither expect nor encourage autonomy and autonomy support, a relatively strong cultural press to enact a controlling motivating style is likely to be a dominating behavioral influence. Hence, in hierarchical countries, the offering of an autonomy-promoting school is not a likely cultural product, assuming the prevailing social norms expect and encourage control and discourage autonomy support. This means that autonomy-promoting schools will be less feasible in hierarchical countries.

Why go through all the trouble to create an autonomy-promoting school, especially when that school is situated within a hierarchical cultural context? We argue that an autonomy-promoting school is a social asset. This is so because the satisfaction of the need for autonomy and offering of recurring classroom opportunities to experience autonomy enable students to become more fully and more wholeheartedly immersed in the learning process. This, in turn, promotes optimal learning and personal growth, as well as the inclinations to internalize cultural values, care for others, and contribute to important social causes.

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