

Jürgen Oelkers

Philosophy of Education and the Growing Impact of Empirical Research^{)}*

1. Point of Departure: The Triumphant Success of Empiricism

Empirical research methods have been used in education since the end of the 19th century. Initially experimental methods taken from psychological laboratories of the time were used and quickly also complemented with applied statistics methods which were popularized in American educational science first and foremost by Edward Thorndike. These procedures made it possible to study large test series of students who before had been outside the horizon of education. Field observations were also developed, making it possible to study concrete phenomena in children's play or in adolescents' behavior. The pioneer of this current of research was the psychologist G. Stanley Hall.

This international research had undisputed advantages and was also supported politically or by teacher unions. Indeed, demands of the public or relevant groups of stakeholders influenced the behavior of educational science. This in turn brought with it another advantage: Philosophical abstractions had to be avoided as did classification into opposing philosophical camps or approaches. Theoretically speaking, there are no "isms" in empirical research which did not require long-term devotees, but rather merely topics and methods. The topics are practice-oriented and the methods are just as transparent as they are demanding, requiring instruction and constant training.

Findings of early empirical research also seemed to actually have an immediate benefit. The famous learning curve from memory research gained admission to the classroom as did the intelligence test and achievement measurements and also contemporary management methods designed to ensure an efficient school organization. One of the adherents and supporters of the "efficiency" movement in the United States was, as is generally known, John Dewey,¹ who often referred to empirical findings or psychological theories.

In general terms, the findings of empirical research before and after World War I strongly influenced progressive education (Oelkers 1998). Today's competition between philosophy of education and empirical research only came about gradually, also because academic power was becoming an increasingly critical factor; at the beginning of the 20th century this power was so weak that people in the field of education both had to and were able to work together. Indeed, child-centered education would hardly have become dominant in the United States if it hadn't drawn on psychological research.

However, despite the undisputed advantages, empirical research did not initially dominate the discipline. Indeed, in the United States, philosophy of education maintained a strong position at the universities, and did so at least until the death of John Dewey (1952),

^{*)} Lecture at the University of Ankara, November 21st 2013,

¹ *School and Society*, Chapter 3: Waste in Education.

i.e. in the entire first half of the 20th century. This influence could also be seen in the fact that continental philosophers of education such as Jacques Maritain, Robert Ulich or Werner Jaeger taught at American universities. In Germany, until 1960 almost all academic pedagogy was somehow or another philosophically oriented.

The situation looks completely different today. Throughout the field of education, there is a large and still increasing demand for empirical research and in fact, it seems as though there is nothing in education which could not be empirically researched. Philosophy of education on the other hand lost considerable ground, professorships were marginalized or even completely done away with since empirical research in education was more promising and seemed to meet government and society's expectations in terms of utility, which can never be satisfied with philosophical means.

Over the last thirty years, large-scale research has developed which in terms of the amount of research can easily be compared to natural science disciplines. The fact that research methods have, to a large extent, become aligned also speaks to this. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection are largely used the same way in all the social sciences. The research philosophy is also identical. The findings are understood as representing "reality" at least in sections. Added to this are strong research successes and methodological progress, as one can see from the various Pisa studies.

"Empirische Bildungsforschung", as it is called in Germany, uses specific concepts, for instance in achievement measurement terms like "competence," or "educational standards." These concepts have a significant impact on pedagogical reflection and today's language of education. The new concepts do not replace the old ones, but rather redefine the field. There is a specific philosophy in the background of every research program and empiricists in particular attach great importance to concepts that are as precise as possible and are not satisfied with vagueness. However, this philosophy has nothing to do with that which is commonly referred to as "philosophy of education."

At the same time, we should note the classic utopias of education have come apart or certainly are receiving less and less notice. A mere thirty years ago, many educators thought they could radically change society or at least the educational institutions with a "new education." A connection to empirical research seemed superfluous and would likely not have supported the expectations of, for example, a "pedagogy of freedom" as Paulo Freire saw it. Revolutionary action was called for here, not research which can only describe and not also change at the same time.

Such references are few and far between in the current discussion, which also means that the mainstream has lost the immediate link to radical philosophies of education. This has to do with the fact that practice has not followed theory. If you study Freire's practical attempts at political liberation with adult literacy at their locations in Brazil, you will not find any successes, but at most paradoxical effects (Stauffer 2007), that do not make it possible to imagine a "concrete utopia."

Even the libertarian "free schools" of the seventies were never the way they were supposed to be according to their own philosophy. Established and often read references of leftist social criticism such as Paul Goodman's (1960) book *Growing Up Absurd* are rarely consulted any more these days. The central question is no longer how one can change the world with education, but rather how education *works*, i.e. what is or is not achieved with it. This question can only be answered empirically and has considerably contributed to radical

philosophy of education's loss of credibility. Its implicit assumptions of effectiveness did not work.

This is connected to a basic problem which goes back to the age of Enlightenment and its pedagogical ideas. The combination between progress, social change and “new education” developed in the 18th century is, today, strongly called into question and with good reason. Skepticism with regard to the long and decisive tradition of enlightenment philosophy and education is now widespread, a fact to which historical research also contributed. The “Enlightenment” of the 18th century is more than just a grand narrative but it does not guarantee the educational claim to educate people to be their best or aim to change society with education.

The leftist historiography of the 19th century was the first to associate “education” with a doctrine of salvation and to firmly establish these claims. Education should serve progressive social objectives, but this requires the opposite of conservative positions which has, for the most part, disappeared in Germany. Instead, the field of “education” has become a subject of empirical research that with its own concepts remeasures the practice fields and calls the expectations of earlier theories into doubt, and this rightly. However one conceives it, “education” does not achieve any far off goals and cannot make any products, but it is precisely the goal-orientation that determined the importance of the concept of education in history.

Nonetheless, “edutopias” can always be reinvented (Peters/Freeman-Moir 2006). The only question here is, who can believe in them given the past experiences - experiences that basically should not influence utopias. Moreover, utopias must have a connection to action: if someone wants to follow them, he must see that there is a chance that they can be realized and how to do so. And, ultimately, if pedagogical optimism is to be preserved, dystopias also have to be excluded, the latter often seeming more credible than the promises that necessarily come along with utopias (Oelkers 2014).

What is clearly recognizable is also the revamping of the core pedagogical concepts such as “teaching” or “education.” This has consequences associated with it, since the identity of education in its traditional form is dependent on these, as Herbart called them, “intrinsic conceptions”². If *teaching* is viewed as a constructivist teaching-learning setting and education as a social interaction, this makes it hard to separate it from psychology or sociology, for instance; it is almost impossible then to convey what the autonomy of educational science, with the exception of the link to practice fields, is supposed to comprise.

The classical term “education” was supposed to refer to designable processes according to which one could imagine that certain people could successfully influence other people, e.g. adults influence children according to their goals. But this idea becomes questionable, if, following George Herbert Mead, the process of education is conceived not as an *influence*, but rather as a social *interaction*. In this case, assumptions that associate the education process with an overall goal like that of emancipation do not apply since that would require a progression over time without unintended consequences which does not exist. Emancipation as a goal of education also requires that all the “unemancipated” have not yet or will not achieve the goal (Rieger-Ladich 2002).

² "Intrinsic conceptions" (Herbart 1896, pg. 83).

These findings do not only apply to German educational science, even if to a certain extent it represents a separate path comparing to the anglo-saxon world of education. Since the 1960's, educational science in Germany is considered to be an academic discipline on its own, whereas in other countries pedagogical topics are handled by various disciplines. In Germany, there is an umbrella society which unites several sub-disciplines under one roof. Themes and tasks of the philosophy of education are usually assigned to professorships of "allgemeine Erziehungswissenschaft" (general pedagogical science).

This special organization does not call the heart of the finding into question since the triumph of empirical research methods and the growing importance of the results for politics and society can be found in all academic cultures. The pressure has not only grown here to generate usable knowledge. The meaning of philosophical questioning is also jeopardized, especially in an area which expects and wants to see quick benefits. But the problem goes deeper.

The central question seems to be, what will become of educational philosophy if its questions and findings can be better empirically verified, with a philosophy of education no longer playing any part. Moreover, this raises the question of who needs or reads philosophy of education if it is no longer radical, no longer makes utopian promises and avoids illusions? But first: What is, or what do we understand by "philosophy of education"?

2. *Philosophy of Education*

There is no single "definitive" philosophy of education as could unquestionably be assumed just a few decades ago, in particular after the analytical philosophy of education became firmly established in the English-speaking world (Hardie 1960, Dearden 1982). But as far back as 1942, Nelson B. Henry³ as editor of the 41st Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education presented "Philosophies of Education" (Henry 1942). Given the breadth and depth of the approaches, the choice of the plural seemed obvious, whereas in the book itself the opposite was claimed, namely with Mortimer Adler (1942), the existence of the *one* true philosophy of education, supposedly determined by the tradition of antiquity.

The discussion of the 1930's and 1940's in the United States was characterized by the contrast of these conservative philosophies of education with progressive education, coined by Rousseau and Fröbel and whose staunchest proponent was John Dewey, although Dewey never prescribed a pure "child-centered" approach. The contrast between conservative and progressive education were ultimately politically aligned and dealt a crippling blow to philosophy of education rather than advancing it. The National Society of the Study of Education reacted to this.

In 1955, another volume about "Philosophies of Education" appeared in the 54th yearbook of the Society. The committee chairman was once again John Seiler Brubacher, who taught philosophy of education at Yale University and became known with his book *Modern Philosophies of Education* (Brubacher 1939). This title was incorporated in the yearbook, meaning that there too, it was a matter of *modern* philosophies of education to be considered supplementary to the contributions in the previous volume (Henry 1955, Editor's Preface). In the first volume, of which 25,000 copies were sold in 13 editions (ibid), "leading philosophers

³ Nelson B. Henry (1883-1969) was a professor of philosophy of education at the University of Chicago.

of education” voiced their opinions whereas the second volume was opened to “men from general philosophy” (ibid, pg. 1).

The reasoning behind this was as follows:

“In the field of general philosophy there are not only more varieties of opinion than in the more limited field of education, but there are also a number of prominent philosophers, whose views on education, if once worked out from their author’s premises, may well provide fresh insights into educational problems” (ibid.).

The aim was thus to overcome the paralysis caused the unsolvable conflict between progressives and conservatives. Indeed, in the 1955 yearbook, prominent and less prominent philosophers presented their reflections on education. The scope is enormous, ranging from Jacques Maritain's neo-thomistic philosophy of education to Kenneth Burke's linguistic philosophy of education all the way to Herbert Feigl's logical-empirical analysis of the goals of education in the age of science. Ontological approaches are represented just as realist or liberal Christian and even the marxist philosophy of education are dealt with⁴ (Henry 1955).

“Education” was, in this context, merely the key word for quite different reflections and approaches which, with the exception of the reference to the word and thus the field of association linked to “education”, do not allow any specificity or particular competence to be identified. But then this raises the question of what the different positions of the “philosophies of education” have in common if it cannot simply be their place in the curriculum of a program of study at universities.

Back in the discussion in the 1942 yearbook, it was stated that there are numerous philosophies of education and precisely that is detrimental. The feeling spread, according to Frederick Breed (1942, pg. 289),⁵ “that philosophy represents a futile approach to the solutions of the world.” Therefore, it was also understandable that “students in considerable number have turned their back on philosophy” (ibid). However, the benefit that students expected from philosophy cannot be delivered.

What the term “philosophy of education” is understood to mean today does not refer to a uniform object or even a recognized standard definition, but rather to many and largely disconnected very different strings of philosophical reflections. “Philosophy” itself in the sense of methodical reflection can be applied to any topic and problems. Attempts have been made time and time again to define what philosophy of education is supposed to be (Maloney 1985), but the very nature of philosophy means that none of the definitions have imposed themselves on all the others.

Philosophy of education often follows approaches and methods from general philosophy. Accordingly, in Germany there is a narrow phenomenological pedagogy that is oriented toward philosophers such as Edmund Husserl or Emmanuel Levinas. In the 1970's, there was an apparently strong Marxist philosophy of education which has since suffered a rapid loss of influence and meaning. Existential philosophy also had a major influence in Germany or France. In this philosophy, pedagogical questions were often dealt with by drawing on writings of Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre who did not say much about education themselves.

⁴ The author of the article was Robert S. Cohen from Boston University.

⁵ Fredrick S. Breed (1876-1952) had studied at the University of Michigan and switched to the University of Chicago in 1917, where he started as an assistant professor and was then awarded a chair.

So there are therefore various ways of linking philosophy and education. In the breadth and diversity of the approaches or orientations one can attempt to distinguish between various types of “philosophy of education”. Below I will outline five of these types, there might be more, but I feel these are the most important ones:

- General philosophy and education
- Normative traditions of philosophy of education
- Analytical philosophy of education
- Critical or postmodern philosophy of education
- Grand theories of education

What is called “philosophy of education” moves in a discursive field which has been very strongly impacted by the history of philosophy and theology, that is with constant recourse to authors and theories of antiquity, the middle ages and the early modern age, while remaining strongly affected by Christian theology up until recently. The major educators since the reformation have been, with few exceptions, all male and protestant.

The topics of “instruction” (eruditio) and “education” (educatio) have been dealt with since antiquity by philosophers. The most famous philosopher of western antiquity is Plato who with his *Paideia* also presented the first major philosophy of education. Since then many philosophers reflect on education and present theories. This approach can also be called “philosophers on education.” Education is just one of their topics with very different meanings and importance. Crucial here is what an author's general philosophy dictates.

Antiquity and not least Christian antiquity produced a number of philosophies of education and constantly inspired debates which are still going on today. The most famous one is that between the sophists and Platonists regarding the question as to what should be taught, why it is done and what role truth plays in teaching. Also dating back to antiquity is the dispute about the original sin between the Augustinians and the Pelagians, which was really only first resolved by Rousseau who called it simply superfluous. Philosophy of education can bear upon these and other “big questions” even today, and solely due to the fact that it refers to its own history.

And these are only questions and viewpoints from Greco-Roman antiquity which were already quite different in Byzantium and do not even come up in this form in even further removed cultural regions (e.g. Persia, China or Japan), whereas there is “education” and thus also “philosophy of education” in all cultures which are associated with names of authors. One only has to think of Zarathustra, Confucius or the representatives of Taoism in the Japan of the middle ages. Thus philosophy of education is not an invention of the West, as Mortimer Adler or German philosopher Eduard Spranger assumed.

Modern philosophers as well have constantly expressed themselves on questions of education and instruction, without however specializing in these questions. The reflection requires the particular author's entire philosophy. Often, for example with Kant or Hegel, authors' statements about instruction and education are simply applied cases of their own philosophies. This also means not dealing with pedagogical problems in and of themselves, but rather considering them based on one's own philosophy and its theorems. One example is the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who often refers to pedagogical problems and this

has the particular appeal that Wittgenstein was for years an Austrian primary school teacher (Peters/Burbules/Smeyers 2008).⁶

Another type of philosophy of education deals with the history of philosophy of education. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, history of ideas is seen as a meaningful and normatively authoritative tradition to which subsequent philosophers can or have to refer back. In Germany, this was how the German “*geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*” after Herman Nohl viewed history of education (Oelkers 2006). The problem with this type of canonization is that normative traditions are themselves products of history and do not have any objective content. Prior to the 19th century, there was simply not a “history of pedagogy” canon which later was held by selected individuals, mostly men.

Referring to Rousseau, Pestalozzi or Herbart today means accepting as a precondition their canonization which is a reception philosophy problem of its own. They are part of the canon which ensures their prominent position as philosophers of education and that it turn presupposes a sharp selection of all other relevant names. Added to this is the fact that historiography was, for a long time, not objective simply because adherents of Rousseau, Pestalozzi or Herbart had provided the authoritative interpretations. Today, precisely this has become doubtful.

A third type of philosophy of education was created with the “linguistic turn” in English-speaking philosophy. What was previously used without question now became a subject of study, namely the language of education. “Education” is a social and public topic for which there is no special scientific language. Reflections use traditional everyday language. In his book *The Language of Education* (1960), which is still authoritative today, Israel Scheffler studied the public language of education, thus setting a milestone.

Even before, there had been some attempts made in this direction (for example by Hardie 1942⁷ or O’Connor 1957⁸), but Scheffler with his book was the first to decisively establish and sustainably impact the analytical philosophy of education. The task was to study and clarify concepts of ordinary language to the greatest extent possible. The analytical philosophy of education abstained from making big promises, proceeded soberly and was an academic success story in the 1960's and 1970's.

This type of linguistic analysis fit in with the academic mainstream in Anglo-Saxon university philosophy for a long time. Scheffler and English authors such as Richard Peters and Paul Hirst turned marginal topics of philosophy into special topics that could not be handled casually, but rather required extensive work and often turned into central themes of the philosopher. The reason for the effort is that ordinary language concepts cannot simply be defined, but rather, after Wittgenstein, must be understood as part of language games which can change their usage and meaning.

Despite the academic success, analytical philosophy of education was not able to establish itself as a strong force. It remained a matter for specialists that barely had any

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) studied at the Vienne Teacher's College in 1919/1920 and was a primary school teacher from 1920 to 1926 in the Austrian towns of Trattenbach, Puchberg am Schneeberg and Ottertal.

⁷ Charles Dunn Hardie (1911-2002) came from Glasgow and studied under Ludwig Wittgenstein in Cambridge. In 1946 he took a position at the University of Tasmania in Australia where he spent his academic life. He left his professorship in 1976.

⁸ Daniel John O'Connor (1914-2012), who completed his doctorate in 1947 under Rudolf Carnap in Chicago, was a professor of philosophy at the universities of Liverpool and Exeter.

impact upon public debates and was perceived in philosophy itself rather as an outsider. In addition, analysis of language concepts can hardly be used to deal with that which is discussed about education in public. The analysis would be too time-consuming and seems to be not helpful.

In academic philosophy, “education” as a concept is now very rarely a matter of discussion. In Germany, “Bildung” is always drawn on whenever empiricism seems too overwhelming. Then the term “Bildung des Subjekts” is brought out and reference is made to Humboldt, Hegel or the Paris manuscripts of young Marx to point to the humanistic purpose of education. But these are appeals or notes of protest and not really a task for an academic discipline that cannot simply rely on an ever glorious and ambiguous past.

For decades, it was indeed Anglo-Saxon philosophers from Alfred Whitehead to Bertrand Russell and Gilbert Ryle who dealt again and again with questions of education and teaching. Today, rather than “education”, general philosophers concentrate on psychological theories that are not politically biased and have acquired strong empirical content, for example those on learning and behavior, development or cognition, which can be based on classic philosophical questions of thinking or the mind.

A fourth type of philosophy of education responds to the fact that education constantly raises and disappoints expectations, simply because no philosophy of education attains the field of practice other than in the form of language games. This branch is called “critical pedagogy” and was initially based on progressive educators from or received in America. The philosophical disposition of this school of thought was not analysis but rather criticism and protest. In this manner, it was possible to pick out as central themes social grievances with which however there were no real research topics associated; criticism alone could be applied effectively.

This changed with the reception of the work by Michel Foucault. Now, new and lasting themes were found, for instance related to the microphysics of power in pedagogical relations, the different treatment of the sexes or dealing with minorities. These themes could not be dealt with without taking a look at practice fields. The classic method of applying general philosophies to pedagogical questions was thus pushed into the background or utilized in this way.

A fifth type would be the grand theories of modern philosophies of education. Philosophers of education have, in their own field, developed theories of education and more specifically of the *concept* of education, which were not simply derived from a general philosophy. These theories can be further discussed, i.e. one can try to either improve or refute them and bring in alternatives. The question is what is understood by “education” and how the concept should be used in theoretical considerations.

One such theory is the thesis of “education as initiation,” developed by Michael Oakeshott and Richard Peters more than fifty years ago. This thesis was quite influential in the seventies and eighties and recently picked up again without ever determining broadly the field. Another general theory of education is “education as experience,” which was developed in American pragmatism. Similar to the initiation theory, the experience theory also has a number of problems posed when one looks at the theories from a distance.

Both of these theses have a direct plausibility ad hoc. Yet if education is the same as experience, one of the two terms is superfluous. But education depends on goals or intentions,

whereas experience arises even without intentions. Education requires occasions and places which result in a certain experience but cannot simply be found in general experience like that of schools.. Similarly, the initiation thesis is also questionable if it is not even clear what one is being initiated into, which with the differentiation of “forms of knowledge” (Hirst 1965) has hardly been adequately explained. Even a curriculum theory would be pushed to its limits here if only knowledge in school subjects or historical knowledge is encompassed here (Petrie 2011, pp. 24-28).

If we view philosophy of education in a historical cross-section and search for the influences of various schools of thoughts and authors, then the following can be observed: The influence of German idealism has declined just as strongly as the link to versions of Christian metaphysics which predominated educational thinking a mere fifty years ago. Today, American pragmatism and cognitive psychology dominate the broader pedagogical field of reflection. John Dewey and Jean Piaget are the most quoted authors in the field, although it must be stated that they are largely viewed as “progressive” educators and thus only in small sectors of their work.

This situation also shows how strong of an impact historiography of reform pedagogy still has on pedagogical thinking. Dewey or Piaget are seen as guarantors for the dogmas of progressive education, i.e. timeless and independent of the context in which their writings came about. They provide guidance, but are then also somewhat sacrosanct, whereas historicization of their work prevents precisely that. It breaks through the predominance of the written text, as Richard Kohler (2008) demonstrated using Jean Piaget as an example.

Yet despite all relativizing of the canon of “grand educators,” philosophers such as Plato, Rousseau or Herbart still have an impact on today’s philosophy of education. It is also not easy to depart from their teachings or at least distance oneself, since they seem to form the core of the pedagogical tradition. Using an example: Even today, Sophists are a tough act to follow, although they were the public teachers and in contrast to Plato knew the limitations of their concepts. But Plato has one clear advantage, i.e. the ideals of education.

The influence of Rousseau's *Emile* on philosophy of education, which at the time was hardly detectable, took on an importance with Romanticism and especially “child-centered” reform pedagogy that is hard to overestimate. Rousseau occupies the theory of the child and thus the central orientation of modern pedagogical thinking. It is not without reason that Piaget is understood as a successor to Rousseau, although his genetic epistemology has nothing to do with that which Rousseau understood by “development of nature” (Oelkers 2002).

Herbart’s teachings are behind many attempts to describe steps of school teaching. Newer approaches have, not coincidentally as with Herbart, four steps⁹ and are only named differently. This may be due to the trivial reason that time-limited school teaching can only be grasped in this way. There would be no time-saving way to accommodate more steps. On the other hand, Herbart's teaching theory is a prerequisite without distance having to be associated with it. “Teaching” thus remains a long-term fixed concept and exempt from further conceptual study.

My third part starts with a crucial about my topic: Philosophy of education - Is it philosophy or education? This question is not exaggerated, but neither is it trivial, since

⁹ Analysis, Synthesis, Association and System: Building on the students' existing knowledge, presenting new knowledge, connecting the new with the known, integration and application of the knowledge.

philosophy actually requires distance, whereas philosophy of education is often considered to be education itself. In these cases, philosophical statements on education are understood as a call to change practice while “practice” and especially its risks and limits are not what the philosophy is all about. Education as practice does not simply follow what philosophy of education dictates or seems to dictate. This difference is often not seen or at least not given the attention it warrants.

3. *What is left for philosophy of education?*

A suggestion as to what should be practically understood by “philosophy of education” was made by the American philosopher Nicholas C. Burbules over ten years ago. For him, philosophy of education is simply the opportunity for philosophers or those interested in philosophy to discuss pedagogical topics. This is expressed as follows:

“Philosophy of education today represents those engaged in ongoing conversations, in person or in print, about certain issues, in full awareness of their diversity and eclecticism of method, while retaining a degree of openness about who else might need to be drawn into those conversations. What counts as philosophy of education is simply what these collective processes of deliberation, paper reviewing, and public discourse acknowledge and accept as pertinent to a set of shared concerns.” (Burbules 2000)

Yet every scientific discipline is based on standards of knowledge, method and control of findings. Unlike in the democratic discourse among citizens, not everyone can or wants to participate. Competence is decisive for access, which also applies equally to the originality of the question, access to previous knowledge and rank in a research community. This also applies to philosophy of education (Siegel 1995).

In the case of topics of instruction and education, exclusion is problematic since the topics are public ones which affect everybody. Accordingly, everybody should be able to participate in a philosophical discourse. This dilemma was heatedly discussed in the past, in particular in American philosophy of education, without arriving at a solution. One can only speak of an academic philosophy of education if the discussing parties are educated in this regard or otherwise belong to the community. It is, in other words, a specialized communication community.

But the term is not protected; anyone can call himself a “philosopher” and “philosophize.” De facto, admission and exclusion are decided on by the discipline's publishing bodies, i.e. publishing houses, journals, congresses and networks. Philosophers then discuss with other philosophers whereas the goal is to reach a larger audience and interest it in philosophical topics. Philosophy of education is particularly confronted with this pressure, also because it deals often with problems it does not define itself.

On the other side: An academic discipline only endures if it is capable of providing for its own continuity. This happens by educating suitable graduate students, but also with topics that are kept constant, that cannot be changed gratuitously, since there is no other way to

demonstrate that they have been seriously addressed. In earlier times, continuity was easy to create, simply by referring to great philosophers who were canonized.

Today, these philosophical paradigms have collapsed or have become the subject of critical research. In modern history of thought, it is no longer so easy to simply refer back to a given name without appreciating the context in which the philosophy was created. One often is then just name-dropping or letting others speak for oneself, whereas research, including in philosophy of education can only mean coming to one's own conclusions. The conditions of research have become much more demanding, including the views to history.

Every philosopher at every time has dealt with others and their arguments must be verified independently and from today's perspective. Anything a given philosopher doubted or rejected must be able to be revisited. This applies in particular when it contradicts the preferences of current interpreters. Rejecting certain approaches, e.g. Kantianism or Hegelianism has consequences for identity, since doing so means that certainties are lost. In addition, the question of how should history of philosophy be dealt with comes up.

“Philosophy of education” defines a range of tasks and cannot be secured by drawing on closed theories of the past. According to Quentin Skinner, the grand theories must be historicized, i.e. understood in the context of their development. This distance vis-à-vis that which we call tradition, is a paramount philosophical task that has to do with the fair comparison of theories and concepts in a historic cross-section. Every major theory has opponents and their arguments are not simply refuted by the fact that a theory establishes dominance and with it discredits or forgets opponents.

But we are not only talking about criticism of an unquestioned tradition. This criticism merely ensures that we are careful with certainties that cannot be arrived at by choosing certain authors from whom a reflection not only takes its point of departure, but to whom it is also easily attributed. Aside from this, philosophy of education also has the task of dealing with public topics associated with its core themes instruction and education.

These themes and their field of association are “notoriously debated” or “essentially contested” (Gallie 1956; Kekes 1977). Philosophy of education must publically take a position, ponder different sides and bolster or weaken certain arguments vis-à-vis others. In this regard, the philosopher of education would be a public person in midst of controversies, without the traditional status of the moralistic intellectual who views his philosophy as superior to all others.

One genuine task for philosophy of education is the criticism and clarification of central and strongly weighted pedagogical categories of public discourse, such as “equal opportunities” or “educational equality.” If concepts such as these are subjected to understanding and one acts as if they were incomprehensible, one immediately has a field for questions of philosophy of education. This also applies in the sense that educational philosophy refers to its own problems of “clarification of concepts,” for instance to vagueness, which might be unavoidable (Black 1949).

Philosophy of education has its own risks with regard to the lifeworld and everyday language. They become particularly clear when philosophical reflection calls into question the implicitness of everyday terms. “Clear” is a term only in naive use in lifeworlds, “clear” in this case means simply being free of doubt and thus a matter of course. This certainty is then

punctured if one asks philosophically what the term “means.” Using the term excludes philosophical doubts.

The problem associated with this is twofold. On the one hand, the philosophical clarification of the term does not itself lead to change the use in ordinary language. Since antiquity, attempts have been made to express “education” in a more philosophically precise manner or to associate an elaborated theory with it. Such a theory never leads however, and this is the second part of the problem, to a conclusive clarification of the meaning. Terms used in everyday language remain ambiguous and ultimately this is all that philosophy can show. Otherwise there would be no new challenges for subsequent philosophers.

As young Jürgen Habermas (1970) would put it: Ordinary language is the last meta-language, reflection cannot go back behind it, at least not if one wants to speak or have a conversation. On the other side of this is simply silence according to Wittgenstein's theory of language games. But then the question arises as to what should be done with the results of philosophy of education. One can also pose the question whether philosophy of education is more than just constant dispute among experts who have learned to call into question simple terms which are used unquestioningly in everyday life. “Clarity” is in any case only possible with regard to one's own philosophizing.

On the other hand, there are intellectual advantages when certainties are shaken up. This also applies in particular with regard to the popular concepts of empirical research in education (Lagemann 2000; Philipps 2009). The prerequisite here is the theoretical work of empirical research itself and the way in which its concepts are perceived, both in the educational professions and in the public at large.

Categories such as “competence” or “teaching standards” should be subjected to sustainable educational philosophy criticism. They are not simply fashions, but rather have consequences on the way in which education and instruction are reflected on in public. Someone focusing on the “implementation of teaching standards” is not only using certain concept but is also formulating an expectation, namely that what the concepts suggest is possible and will be realized.

Philosophy of education, in other words, makes it clear which philosophy is hidden behind the concepts. This also applies for example to the so-called “output orientation,” which was adopted from certain economic philosophies, without knowing for sure what was going to be triggered with this in the professional fields of education. Behind every empiricism there is a philosophy which is usually not elaborated and often merely represents the intuition of the research. Empiricism is also always a normative strategy, only with this condition remaining invisible.

But every questionnaire and every interview has a philosophy, otherwise it would hardly be plausible to ask questions at all. Empiricists are generally not interested in this normative side, which is always given even with edged terms. Researchers usually are interested in the validation of the questions and the statistical evaluation of the questions, not the silently required normative. Empiricists and philosophers of education could work together here in a fruitful manner. This also applies to the reality implications of empirical education research, for example when achievement measurement is generalized beyond that which measurements can do.

Education philosophy tasks also include criticism of its own concepts. Israel Scheffler, in his time, only studied the logic of metaphors or definitions in education, and not however, the historical content of the language of education (Oelkers 1997). The language is not only highly suggestive but also misleading. Metaphors in education are not identified as such, but rather simply used with strong reality implications. Philosophical analysis can show this and associate it with a criticism of the pedagogical dogmatism often associated therewith.

This also applies for example to the much used expressions “child-centered” or “nature of the child,” which Charles Hardie had already challenged in 1942 and which even today continue to determine public discourse on education. But when one says, “the child is in the center,” then all one has done is use a metaphor, and moreover, one steeped in tradition, that goes back to the theological geometry of the 17th century. The core term “education” is also a metaphor but is not perceived as such (Guski 2007). The question is if critical analysis can change public discourse.

The task lies in dissolving linguistic habits and insofar certainties and gaining space for better concepts which can be communicated with more prospects for understanding. Today it suffices, for “child-centered education” to refer to Maria Montessori and gain approval with her authority. It seems hardly possible to conceive of education other than “from the child” and precisely this should challenge philosophy of education. It is, at the core, anti-authoritarian and must go beyond its own jargon.

In 2007, the American historian Diane Ravitch published a glossary aimed at documenting the jargon of pedagogy, the currently commonly turned terms, the catch phrases and the incomprehensible buzzwords. She freely named the glossary after Orwell *EdSpeak*. (Ravitch 2007) She was, she writes in the preface, first confronted with what she calls “the strange tongue of education” during her post-graduate study at the Teachers College of Columbia University (ibid, pg. 1). There she heard curious words and even more curious was that everyone seemed to understand the meaning of these words, except her, Diane Ravitch (ibid).

“*EdSpeak* is my attempt to explain in everyday language the esoteric terms, expressions, and buzzwords used in U.S. education today. Some of these terms are multisyllabic replacements for simple, easily understood words; others describe government programs or the arcane technology of testing” (ibid. pg. 2).

It is a language for insiders that often comes close to an affectation and is preferably used by experts not required to be understandable. Practicians in the educational professions speak and reflect differently, whereas *EdSpeak* puts pressure on them to understand something concrete. The pedagogical language does not fit the practice, but that doesn't have to be a problem for the language.¹⁰

Philosophy of education already has validity if it is sensitive to linguistic impertinences and practical impossibilities of education. This also means distancing itself from the classic two-worlds theories which have defined pedagogy since Plato. Rousseau was also so effective for so long because he called the existing society into question and sought out radically different possibilities for education. This is however only possible if one can assume a second world beside the existing one in which everything can be done better. Not coincidentally, for Rousseau this world is that of nature.

¹⁰ See unveilings at <http://www.sciencegeek.net/lingoi/html>

What themes should today's philosophy of education discuss? Nicholas Burbules (2000) emphasized three central themes that should be dealt with in philosophy of education or should already be the topic of major debates, namely "identity," "difference", and "power". All three come from general philosophy. The first theme was primarily developed in German idealism and is also resurfacing today in the philosophy of recognition; the second is mostly associated with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and the third is largely perceived with the works of Michel Foucault.

All these themes have also been intensely handled by philosophers of education and they continue to be considered difficult and challenging for this reason, but they all have positive connotations or are supposed to gain positive aspects through criticism or eliminate negative ones. "Identity" should be achieved, "difference" often determines the entire philosophical view today and "power" is seen against the backdrop of democratization. Topics that are exclusively negatively connoted remain mostly unmentioned in philosophy of education or are considered subjects to be avoided.

Themes such as *illusion* and *delusion*, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, *silence* with reference to Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein or even *lies*, *deceit* and *guile*, which Kant morally condemned and which nevertheless appear in every education. The same applies to *aggression* and *hate*, which for Sigmund Freud are considered unavoidable in life, without it being clear what this unavoidability means in education.

Such themes can be found in general philosophy but almost never in philosophy of education which refers to a morally defined practice field in which reflection is simply not free. The field sets the limits which cannot be easily exceeded however one pleases. Philosophers can reflect on the fluctuating, but still value of lies (Wiles 1988), educators cannot however or don't do so, even though their field is full of them (Chiapparini 2011).

And also delusion, insincerity or hate are a reality in education and would thus be a theme of philosophical reflection. Illusions about education can often be found in practice and cannot be simply avoided because they are only recognized after the fact. Silence too, for example in cases of abuse, often occurs in the reality of education without having being dealt with effectively.

There are not only negatively and positively connoted themes, but also theorems that determine pedagogical expectations or desires in an undetected way. As such, for today's parents Rousseau's "perfectibilité" of the child seems to be very attractive without them even realizing it. But why do we want perfect children? That would be an empirical and a philosophical question which says more about education than every attempt to define "identity." Such an effort in education is always in danger to end up in a learning goal and then becomes immune to philosophical skepticism.

The ban on comparing children with others today is also determined by Rousseau. There is hardly a thought in the history of philosophy of education that has been perceived more strongly than Rousseau's determination at the beginning of the forth book in *Emile*. Only one who does *not* compare himself with others retains his original self-love (*amour de soi*) (Rousseau 1969, pg. 493) and thus natural perfection.

In today's world of education perfect children are always unique. They should be understood from their own nature, says every guide book in education, whereas children are

always comparing themselves since they grow up in social interactions and cannot do anything but relate to others. It would be a paramount task for philosophy of education to study the impact of Rousseau's ideas and test explanations as to why they gained so much influence. This influence is found in everyday reflection and it is precisely this fact which should challenge philosophers of education.

But there are also tasks in the field of epistemology. The philosophy of education of today should ultimately assume that “the” world, in whatever form, is not at its disposal. Even the dream of building a new society with education is no longer shared by many philosophers of education although radicalism is always quite possible to claim. But the more one has to engage in practice, the fewer Platonic options are available. The philosopher of education has to take notice of the field of education or even move in it, if he wants to gain notice. Otherwise he is in danger to be perceived as an ideologist who certainly does not know better.

The search for alternatives has preoccupied philosophy of education for more than 200 years now. The suggested solutions have been repeated and educational practice has not changed simply because these solutions were on the table. Mostly these were other ways of living outside the existing society where a path leads from the early socialists to the life reformers all the way to the “Landerziehungsheime” (country boarding schools) of the German reform pedagogy. The problem is that these alternatives never even got close to that which was expected from their own philosophy of education.

If we are now asked what philosophy of education can do faced with the superiority of empiricism, i.e. what is still open to it, then on one hand we can imagine new ways of cooperating with empiricists, for example through the epistemological problems of constructivism which are often not even taken note of and discussed in the specialized didactics and education research of today. The findings of this research can also be studied from a history of education point of view since the results often do not surpass what reform pedagogy had postulated back at the beginning of the 20th century.

But clear delimitations are advised, however, in the fields of education that cannot, under any circumstances, be dealt with using the methods of empirical research. This applies for example to esthetic phenomena which play a large part in the growth of children, or as mentioned to the analysis of the language education. Philosophy of education can describe the aesthetics of the Pisa ranking, but the Pisa test cannot deal with any esthetic problems.

When we say that problems are the focus, then on the one hand this refers to the philosophy of pragmatism, and on the other hand this makes it clear that there is definitely a consensus among the various disciplines to consider “thinking” as a problem-solving process. Pragmatism is not simply one approach among many; otherwise such a consensus would not even be possible. This can only be compared to the influence of behaviorism on contemporary economics.

But there are also *unsolvable* problems in philosophy of education or at least ones that seems to be unsolvable, problems that confuse normal expectations and push the usual reflection to its limits. This also is a task for philosophy. For example, how does one solve problems of decaying societies in which the provision of education has fallen apart and is not being restored? Or how to deal with children who will not profit from education? There certainly are limits and one should therefore be careful and not consider all the problems that come up in education to be solvable.

In sum: Philosophy of education does not mean burdening reflection with belief-dependent dogmas or going back to prominent authors. The reference to other philosophers can only be conceived of as a stimulus or refusal, i.e. a conflict which creates its own problems but does not create a false certainty. Great philosophers are a challenge or a provocation and they are setting standards of thinking, but whoever simply agrees with, say, Kant or Hegel must know, in philosophy of education, what he is doing.

Literature

- Adler, M. J.: In Defense of the Philosophy of Education. In: N.B. Henry (Ed.): Forty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education Part I: Philosophies of Education. Chicago/Ill.: University of Chicago Press 1942, pp. 195-250.
- Black, M.: Language and Philosophy: Studies in Method. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1949.
- Breed, F.S.: Philosophy of Education. In: Review of Educational Research Vol. 12 (June 1942).
- Brubacher, J.S.: Modern Philosophies of Education. New York: McGraw-Hill 1939.
- Burbules, N.C.: Philosophy of Education. In: B. Moon/M. Ben-Peretz/S. Brown (Eds.): Routledge International Companion to Education. New York: Routledge 2000, pp. 3-18.
- Chiapparini, E.: Ehrliche Unehrllichkeit. Eine qualitative Untersuchung der Tugend Ehrlichkeit bei Jugendlichen an der Zürcher Volksschule. Opladen: Budrich Verlag 2012.
- Dearden, R.F.: Philosophy of Education, 1952-1982. In: British Journal of Educational Studies Vol. 30, No. 1 (1982), pp. 57-71.
- Habermas, J.: Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik In: R. Bubner/K. Cramer/R. Wiehl (Hrsg.): Dialektik und Hermeneutik. Festschrift für Hans-Georg Gadamer. Band II. Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1970, pp. 73-104.
- Hardie, Ch. D.: Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hardie, Ch. D.: The Philosophy of Education in a New Key. In: Educational Theory Vol. 10 (October 1960), pp. 255-261.
- Henry, N.B.: (Ed.): Forty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education Part I: Philosophies of Education. Chicago/Ill.: University of Chicago Press 1942.
- Henry, N.B.: (Ed.): Modern Philosophies of Education. Fifty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Part I. Chicago/Ill.: University of Chicago Press 1955.
- Herbart, J. F.: The Science of Education. Its General Principles Deduced from its Aim. And The Aesthetic Revelation of the World. Transl. by H.M. Felkin/E. Felkin. Preface by O. Browning. Boston: D.C. Heath&Co. Publishers 1896.
- Gallie, W.B.: Essentially Contested Concepts. In: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Vol. 56 (1956), pp. 167-198.
- Goodman, P.: Growing Up Absurd: The Problems of Youth in an Organized System. New York: Random House 1960.
- Guski, A.: Metaphern der Pädagogik: Metaphorische Konzepte von Schule, schulischem Lernen in pädagogischen Texten von Comenius bis zur Gegenwart, Bern at.al.: Peter Lang Verlag 2007 (= Explorationen. Studien zur Erziehungswissenschaft, J. Oelkers (Ed.), Volume 53)
- Hirst, P.H.: Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge. In: R.D. Archambault (Ed.): Philosophical Analysis and Education, London: Routledge&Kegan Paul 1965, pp. 113-138.

- Kekes, J.: Essentially Contested Concepts: A Reconsideration In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 1977), pp. 71-89.
- Kohler, R.: *Piaget und die Pädagogik. Eine historiografische Analyse.* Bad Heilbrunn/Obb.: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2008.
- Lagemann, E.C.: *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Educational Research.* Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press 2000.
- Maloney, K.E.: *Philosophy of Education: Definitions of the Field, 1942-1982.* In: *Educational Studies* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1985), pp. 235-258.
- O'Connor, D.: *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education.* London: Routledge 1957.
- Oelkers, J.: Is There a 'Language of Education'? In: H. Siegel (Ed.): *Reason and Education. Essays in Honor of Israel Scheffler.* Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Publications 1997, pp. 125-138.
- Oelkers, J.: *Empirical Research in Progressive Education.* In: *International Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 27, No. 8 (1998), pp. 715-722.
- Oelkers, J.: *Rousseau and the Image of „Modern Education“.* In: *Journal of Curriculum Studies* Vol. 34. No. 6 (2002), pp. 679-698.
- Oelkers, J.: *The Strange Case of German „Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik“.* The Mental Side of the Problem. In: R. Hofstetter/B. Schneuwly (Eds.): *Passion, Fusion, Tension. New Education and Educational Sciences, End 19th - Middle 20th Century.* Bern et al.: Peter Lang 2006, pp. 191-222.
- Oelkers, J.: *Utopia, State and Democracy.* In: C. Aubrey/M. Geiss/V. Magyar/J. Oelkers (Eds.): *Education and the State.* London: Routledge 2014 (in print).
- Peters, M./Freeman-Moor, J.(Eds.): *Edutopias: New Utopian Thinking in Education.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2006.
- Peters, M./Burbukles, N./Smyers, P.: *Showing and Doing: Wittgenstein as a Pedagogical Philosopher.* Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers 2008.
- Petrie, H.P.: *The Dilemma on Enquiry and Learning.* Heyward, CA: Living Control Systems Publishing 2011.
- Phillips, D.C.: *Empirical Educational Research: Charting Philosophical Disagreement in an Undisciplined Field.* In: H. Siegel (Ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education.* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 381-406.
- Ravitch, D.: *EdSpeak. A Glossary of Education Terms, Phrases, Buzzwords, and Jargon.* Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development 2007.
- Rieger-Ladich, M.: *Mündigkeit als Pathosformel. Beobachtungen zur pädagogischen Semantik.* Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft 2002.
- Rousseau, J.-J.: *Oeuvres Complètes, éd. B. Gagnebin/M. Raymond, t. IV: Emile. Education - Morale - Botanique.* Paris: Editions Gallimard 1969.
- Scheffler, I.: *The Language of Education.* Springfield/Ill.: Charles C. Thomas 1960.
- Siegel, H.: *What Price Inclusion?* In: A. Neiman (Ed.): *Philosophy of Education* 1995. Champaign/Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society 1995. pp. 1-22.
- Stauffer, M.: *Pädagogik zwischen Idealisierung und Ignoranz. Eine Kritik der Theorie, Praxis und Rezeption Paulo Freire.* Bern et. al.: Peter Lang 2007. (= *Explorationen. Studien zur Erziehungswissenschaft*, J. Oelkers (Ed.), Volume 44).
- Wiles, A.M.: *Lying: Its Inconstant Value.* In: *Southern Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 26 (1988), pp. 275-284.