

Philosophy of Education

Filosofía de la educación

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A dominant practice of philosophy of education conceives of it as a kind of supplementary inquiry or meta-reflection that regards educational research and practice itself as an *object of knowledge*. It is a critical philosophy of education either in the Kantian tradition, focusing on the internal and external conditions (relating to critical theory, sociology of knowledge, ethics of science) for the valid production of knowledge on the field of education, or more in the hermeneutic-practical or Aristotelean tradition, trying to understand practices and qualifying them through (historical) contextualisations (sketching horizons of meaning referring to traditions, languages, cultures,...). This kind of philosophical work is based upon or oriented towards knowledge about the rules and limits, the conditions and criteria, the concepts and arguments, the presuppositions and assumptions that have to be taken into account for valid knowledge production, for the justification of claims and interpretations (and actions based on them). It conceives of itself as being “foundational” or “general” and always seems to operate *in the name of* some authority: reason (in all its varieties: communicative, universal, theoretical, practical reason, etc.), truth, justice, democracy or even the academic discipline itself. This kind of philosophical work belongs to a tradition that conceives of the work of philosophy as a work of judgment, ordering, justification, selection, clarification of concepts, interpretation, explication (sometimes exegesis) and is in this sense “critical” as it is in one way or another oriented towards validity claims (either ethical/normative or epistemological). This means that *it puts reality* (educational research and theory, educational policy and practice) *to the test* of its own thinking (theory, concepts, knowledge): the test of argumentative logic, of

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interpretative procedures/criteria, of norms or principles (of theoretical or practical reason), of theoretical systems or philosophies (either deductively or analytically constructed). Its truth-telling has something either of a demonstration (it wants to teach something), or of a judgement (separation between valid/not-valid; right/wrong, etc.) or of a de-mystification (revealing what is underlying or supposed i.e. denouncing illusions). Its writings and utterances are disciplined and in an “addressed” language: defining the public that lacks enlightenment i.e. appropriate knowledge.

Besides this critical tradition there exists another, admittedly marginal, tradition in philosophy, which we can call the *ascetic* (or existentially oriented) tradition. In this tradition, the work of philosophy is in the first place a work on the self i.e. *putting oneself to the test of contemporary reality*, implying an enlightenment not of others but of oneself, however of one-self not as subject of knowledge but as subject of action. This putting one-self to test is, therefore, an exercise—“ascetic” coming from “askesis” meaning in the first place exercise and not self-denial—in the context of self-formation and self-education: it seeks to transform or modify one’s mode of being and how one lives the present (see e.g. Foucault, Wittgenstein, Cavell). This exercise, which has been described by various authors as an “*exercise of/in thought*” (Arendt), can be conceived as a *public gesture* or a way to make things public and as a condition for a truth-telling that is illuminating and inspiring (offering not in the first place knowledge or judgements, but experience), that is operating in one’s own name and warranted by the actual life of the speaker, and not by its method or foundation. Taking Arendt’s description in the preface to her book “Between Past and Future” as starting point we can, thus, conceive of philosophy of education as “exercises in thought” being mainly experiments arising out of the actuality of incidents, and having the form of essays in which one’s presence in the present is at stake in view of literally illuminating that present, of moving in that present and of inspiring words with a renewed meaning (inspiring life in that present). Philosophy (of education) thus understood as exercise can be educational in three senses. First as a kind of investigation or research that implies a bringing into play (putting to the test) of the researcher herself i.e. implying a self-education as “work on the self”. But philosophy as an essay is as well a public gesture and therefore also educational in the sense that it can have a meaning for others who are invited to share the experience and constitute a public (i.e. to put themselves to the test and not to receive a teaching). And lastly, such philosophy can be educational in the sense that the present which is at stake (and is investigated) is the educational present. Concerning precisely this present, I believe, that what is important today is to make the questions: “what is education”, “what is adulthood”, “what is a child”, “what is a university”, “what is a school”, “what is a family”, “what is an asylum”, “what is a teacher”, “what is a student”, etc. into “*real questions*” i.e. into matters of concern (matters that make us think i.e. make us trying to move in the gap between past and future) into “common” issues. This implies that these “what” questions are no questions for definitions or atemporal essences, but open existential questions for what it could mean to educate, to be an adult, etc, for reinventing their meaning, reinventing a truly human life. Things take their course, transformations are going on, and all kinds of forces work. The point is not to forget oneself as the point where and through which the forces work and where and through which “insight in the game of forces that constitute our existence” can be gained, but also where and through which they are splitted up and broken. That is why we need to put ourselves to the test of contemporary reality.