

HOW MAY EDUCATION BE ORGANIZED TO SAFEGUARD ITS AUTONOMY?

Herner Saeverot

Department of Pedagogy Religion and Social Studies
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

ABSTRACT. This article searches for an autonomous discipline of education, one that is a self-governing discipline and exercises the right to organize its own activities and to make independent decisions. In undertaking this quest, it asks: how may education be organized to safeguard its autonomy so as to be able to generate strong and unique educational knowledge and theory? To address this question, Herner Saeverot argues for a conceptual structure comprising three interrelated perspectives: education as translation (ETN), education as task (ETK), and education as truth (ETH). These three perspectives are part of the overarching term “the science of education” (SE). While ETN translates knowledge from noneducational disciplines into educationally relevant knowledge, ETK produces distinct educational knowledge or theory directly from educational practice (EP). Through these processes, education can function as an autonomous and a self-governing discipline. However, more research is needed to identify what would be required for education to become a strong autonomous discipline. The reason for this is that ETK ultimately produces educational theory in a weak sense, that is, it yields knowledge structures that are too loose or poorly articulated to be designed as strong theory. Thus, ETH examines ETK to produce educational theory in a strong sense, in other words, knowledge that has undergone thorough scientific verification and theoretical substantiation. By way of this organization, educational theory is developed through (1) ETK as a firsthand experience in which practice-based knowledge and theory is derived directly from EP, and (2) ETH as a second-order observation of EP in which theory-based knowledge is derived indirectly from EP and directly from practice-based theory (ETK).

KEY WORDS. the science of education; autonomous discipline; educational theory; weak theory; strong theory

INTRODUCTION

What does autonomous education mean? How might such an education be achieved? How is it possible to organize educational research in such a way that the discipline of education can become autonomous? I raise these questions due to a problem that occurs over and over again, namely, that education is being invaded by other disciplines. This is because modern education has evolved into an interdiscipline in the form of educational sciences (henceforth, ESS) where several disciplines are involved in educational research. This is not only a trend in the Anglo-American tradition, but also within the Continental *Pädagogik* tradition. The German educationist Klaus Prange clarifies this development:

When it comes to questions of learning, the psychologists have the word. When it comes to the content in public education (curriculum), the so-called “subject didactics” make the decisions. Whenever questions of organization and social connections of learning and education are debated, sociologically oriented experts come into play. As for the objectives and moral issues of education, *Pädagogik* turns to its origin; viz., philosophy and theology, if, that is, these issues are not politically determined.¹

1. Klaus Prange, *Die Zeigestruktur der Erziehung: Grundriss der Operativen Pädagogik* [The pointing structure of education: Outline of an operational pedagogy] (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), 15 (my translation).

For sure, the *Pädagogik* tradition, as opposed to the Anglo-American tradition of education, is associated with the Continental construction of education that does not adopt the interdisciplinary approach to education but rather embraces a unique view of education as a discipline in its own right.² However, the tendency away from an independent educational discipline is evident in the *Pädagogik* tradition, as the history and development of *Pädagogik* in Germany and Scandinavia, and other European countries as well, show an enormous willingness on the part of educators (for example, teachers) and educationists (educational researchers/theorists) to adhere to other disciplines.³ However, this development has its drawbacks. For example, there are philosophers of education who think education itself is philosophical and that concrete and practical educational questions must be interpreted through the fundamental principles of philosophy,⁴ hence reducing education to applied philosophy. The same tendency is also obvious within the field of sociology of education, where education gladly borrows sociological objectives related to gender, equality, identity, sociocultural developments, and multiculturalism, to name but a few.⁵ Although these concepts and objectives may be relevant to education, the problem is that they are often formed and executed from a sociological perspective.⁶ This is perhaps the main problem with education as an interdiscipline, that is, its willingness to borrow objectives, concepts, theories, and methods from external sources.

Already in 1929, in *The Sources of a Science of Education*, John Dewey claimed that “Education is autonomous and should be free to determine its own ends, its own objectives.”⁷ The singular form of Dewey’s term “science of education” (henceforth: SE), as opposed to the plural term “educational sciences,” underlines that, for Dewey, education is autonomous, meaning a self-governing discipline with the right to organize its own activities and to make independent decisions.

2. Gert Biesta, “Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education: A Comparative Analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental Construction of the Field,” *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 19, no. 2 (2011): 175–192.

3. Johannes Bellmann, “Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?,” in *Pedagogikkens språk* [The language of education], ed. Herner Saeverot and Tobias Werler (Oslo, Norway: Gyldendal, 2017), 104–117.

4. See Hans Skjervheim, “Eit grunnproblem i pedagogisk filosofi” [A basic problem in the philosophy of education], in *Deltakar og tilskodar og andre essays*, ed. Hans Skjervheim (1968; repr. Oslo, Norway: Tanum-Norli A/S, 1995), 63–64.

5. Hanno Su and Johannes Bellmann, “Inferentialism at Work: The Significance of Social Epistemology in Theorising Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 52, no. 2 (2018): 230–245.

6. *Ibid.*

7. John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York: Liveright, 1929), 38.

This definition is close to the etymological meaning of the concept of autonomy, which derives from the Greek “autonomous” (from *autos* “self” and *nomos* “law”), meaning having its own laws.⁸ In light of this autonomous idea, Dewey warned that “[t]o go outside the educational function and to borrow objectives from an external source” would be “to surrender the educational cause.”⁹ However, advocating for education as a self-governing or an autonomous discipline is not the same as calling for it to be an isolated discipline. Education should and must collaborate with other disciplines, but such collaboration should not entail being invaded by the premises of these other disciplines. Let me take an example from modern physics to clarify this point. To find solutions to certain problems, philosophical perspectives may be included in works of physics, but not in such a manner that the physics findings are subdued by philosophical principles. In such a case, philosophy — or any other discipline, for that matter — is subject to the discipline of physics, not vice versa. Such a relationship is also found in other fields of study, such as medicine, where other disciplines — chemistry, physics, sociology, philosophy, and so on — are drawn into the research in order to provide new perspectives to medical questions. Importantly, as in the physics example, the discipline of medicine is not overruled by these other disciplines, but they are subject to medicine’s judgments. In my view, education should learn from strong disciplines such as physics and medicine, in the sense that sources from other disciplines can be used, but only after education has developed and clarified problems, aims, and purposes from within education itself. Moreover, educational practice (henceforth: EP), which in my view is about an education for the good of the person and an education for the good of humankind,¹⁰ should be examined from the point of view of education, in addition to psychology, sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines.¹¹

In such an approach, I would argue that one should think differently when it comes to organizing education. Thus, my main question reads: how may education be organized to safeguard its autonomy so as to be able to generate strong and unique educational knowledge and theory? In the following, I shall argue for a conceptual structure consisting in three interrelated perspectives: education as translation (henceforth: ETN), education as task (henceforth: ETK), and education as truth (henceforth: ETH). I take it that these three perspectives can be part of the overarching term the science of education (SE). Even though I am to a certain extent critical of an interdisciplinary approach to education, I actually think there are some advantages to such a perspective and also to the fact that

8. *Lexico* (online), s.v. “autonomy,” noun, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/autonomy>.

9. Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education*, 38.

10. Following Stephen Kemmis, “Researching Educational Praxis: Spectator and Participant Perspectives,” *British Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 6 (2012): 885–905.

11. Herner Saeverot and Gert Biesta, “On the Need to Ask Educational Questions about Education,” *Policy Futures in Education* 11, no. 2 (2013): 175–184.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT AREAS OF EDUCATION

<i>Educational Practice (EP)</i>	conducts an education for the good of the person and an education for the good of humankind.
<i>Educational Sciences (ESS)</i>	examines EP from several different disciplines.
<i>Education as Translation (ETN)</i>	translates noneducational knowledge — which is developed through ESS — into educational knowledge.
<i>Education as Task (ETK)</i>	develops educational and practice-based knowledge through EP. ETK is motivated by the improvement of EP.
<i>Education as Truth (ETH)</i>	examines whether the practice-based knowledge developed through ETK is true. ETH is motivated by questions of truth.
<i>The Science of Education (SE)</i>	is an overarching term which includes all the above sub-areas of education. SE is autonomous, meaning a self-governing discipline, with the right to organize its own activities and make independent decisions.

several disciplines are involved in educational research. A presupposition, though, is that ETN gets involved. My point is that education may not be independent from external sources; however, research findings from noneducational disciplines should, from an educational point of view, be translated into educationally relevant knowledge. Through ETK, EP is examined and reflected upon by those who are directly involved in this field, be it educators or educationists. The objective is to develop educational and practice-based knowledge. This component is integral to organizing education as a strong, autonomous discipline, as the knowledge developed through that process is uniquely educational. The next step happens through ETH, where the practice-based knowledge can be further investigated and strengthened. Whereas ETK is motivated by the improvement of EP, ETH is motivated by questions of truth, but not in the sense of universal truth (I will elaborate on this point later in the article). Can a practice-based knowledge developed through ETK be considered true? ETH thus has a direct interest in theory and an indirect interest in practice. Although the developed educational theory can in this way become strong, it still needs to be tested, from many different perspectives and by many researchers. Politics should never intervene in the process of research, but should enter the scene only after the conclusions have been drawn.

Since I divide education into several areas, I will initially define these different areas in table 1. More detailed definitions and explanations of these sub-areas are offered later in the text.

EDUCATION AS TRANSLATION (ETN)

The argument that follows is not about replacing ESS with education as an autonomous discipline (SE) — that would be an idealistic and hopeless project.

That being said, I think it may be realistic to give both ESS and SE space to exist side by side while interacting with each other. If there is only room for ESS, we are, as Dewey warned,¹² in danger of surrendering the educational cause. Let me elaborate.

TWO THINGS AT STAKE

As I implied in the introduction, modern education has taken for granted that education is an interdiscipline rather than an autonomous discipline, as old and new interdisciplinary variants of education have been regenerated and reestablished within the interdiscipline of educational sciences. For example, disciplines with no historical or direct connection to educational questions and problems, such as economics, political science, and law, among others, have been integrated in the structural framework of ES.¹³ As for education, it is forced into the structure of this interdiscipline. Some may argue that this is not a problem at all, or even that education should and must be an interdiscipline. Such an argument is generally based on quantity rather than quality — in other words, the more perspectives on education the better.¹⁴ I am critical of the idea of organizing education as an interdiscipline and nothing more because such an organization will deprive education of its autonomy as well as the space to develop distinctive educational knowledge.

These two problems emerge when multiple disciplines examine education, or, more specifically, the field of educational practice in order to develop knowledge. However, such development of knowledge is rooted on the premises of noneducational disciplines. Thus, the interdisciplinary structure of ESS makes it difficult, if not impossible, to secure the autonomy of education. Admittedly, there may be benefits to including new and different perspectives into educational research, as one will gain a broad view of education. But there are also hazards. When education has been robbed of its autonomy by way of being subordinated to the interdisciplinary field of ESS, the language of education becomes either completely absent or very unclear. The reason for this is that the disciplines examining EP do not generate distinctive educational knowledge as the point of views are noneducational.¹⁵ In other words, if the research object is studied from a noneducational perspective, the research object remains unidentifiable with regard to the educational dimension.¹⁶

Let me offer a concrete example. Various fields, such as philosophy of education and sociology of education, strive to elucidate educational issues and problems

12. Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education*.

13. Cristoph Wulf, *Educational Science: Hermeneutics, Empirical Research, Critical Theory* (New York: Waxmann, 2003); and Tom Are Trippestad, Anja Swennen, and Tobias Werler, eds., *The Struggle for Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Governance and Reforms* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

14. Trippestad, Swennen, and Werler, eds., *The Struggle for Teacher Education*.

15. Biesta, "Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education."

16. Ibid.

from their particular viewpoints. While this may, at times, be fruitful for ensuring the widest possible perspective in education, there is a danger. Specifically, education as a discipline may fall apart and end up divided among a number of research areas, each with its own specific perspective. Moreover, in many cases these different research areas of education have little contact with each other and sometimes also have little or no interest in and understanding of each other's research.¹⁷ Such a circumstance leads to two primary problems. First, the autonomy of education will suffer as it is governed and controlled by other disciplines. Second, one cannot develop educational knowledge by investigating EP only through the lenses of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and so on. To generate specific educational knowledge, researchers need to examine education from the viewpoint of education.¹⁸ That said, my point is not to stop examining education or educational practice from many different disciplines, as an interdisciplinary perspective can ensure a broad perspective of EP. The point is rather that the research field associated with education also needs to include education as a perspective, in fact, as the primary perspective in relation to the perspectives of other disciplines.

THE TRANSFER PROBLEM AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EDUCATION

However, in order to safeguard the autonomy of education while being able to generate educational knowledge, I shall argue that the so-called "transfer problem"¹⁹ must be solved. The transfer problem is a result of the multiple perspectives of education discussed above, that is, it is connected to the problem that knowledge generated by noneducational disciplines does not yield educational knowledge. In an educational light, such noneducational knowledge should therefore be transferred or translated into educational knowledge. The following thought experiment from research on reading and writing difficulties can perhaps clarify what I mean by the transfer problem. Will a linguist be able to contribute to the development of educational knowledge, or will the linguist add linguistic interests, such as increasing competence in grammar, that might exacerbate reading and writing difficulties when we see this in relation to the interests of education? Might the linguist force interests prioritized in linguistics, such as grammar and semantics, on the research so as to solve his or her own problems associated with reading and writing difficulties — problems that may not initially be associated with educational interests (for example, the interest that students may find their place in the world as subjects²⁰) — with the result that the primacy of the educational perspective in the research becomes complicated and is perhaps ultimately undermined?

17. See also René Arcilla, "Why Aren't Philosophers and Educators Speaking to Each Other?," *Educational Theory* 52, no. 1 (2002): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2002.00001.x>.

18. Biesta, "Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education."

19. Gert Biesta, Julie Allan, and Richard Edwards, "Introduction: The Theory Question in Education and the Education Question in Theory," in *Making a Difference in Theory: The Theory Question in Education and the Education Question in Theory*, ed. Biesta, Allan, and Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1–9.

20. Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (London: Routledge, 2014).

How may the transfer problem be solved? How may educational research benefit from the knowledge generated by disciplines other than education? This is where educationists play a mediating role in which they translate research from noneducational disciplines into educational knowledge and possibly also into educational theory.²¹ In this way, educationists can strengthen and legitimize the educational dimension in research, theory, and practice.

However, this task is demanding in several ways. Not only does it require knowledge about the discipline of education itself, but it also requires knowledge in and about other disciplines. Despite the demands of this task, educationists ought to develop a mediating competence, preferably through formal training in education. The main reason for this is that if education does not play a mediating role, it is not self-evident that interdisciplinary educational research will be related to education, in which case the particular research may ultimately be more or less meaningless for the discipline of education. ESS have no such mediating role. In many contexts, ESS are characterized by an “unreflective eclecticism,” that is, an eclectic quest for knowledge from disciplines other than education, and one in which there is no subsequent effort to convey this knowledge into an educational framework.²² Thus, the risk is that different types of research draw research and knowledge away from a focus on the specifically educational dimensions. I propose, therefore, that ESS should be regarded as a source of knowledge for SE. This implies that ETN examines and processes the knowledge that ESS have produced and eventually translates this knowledge into educationally relevant knowledge.

For example, ESS rely heavily on learning theories that have been developed in disciplines other than education, such as psychology.²³ One of the consequences of this is that psychological questions — such as “How does learning occur?,” and “How do students learn?” — are given priority over educational questions — such as “How to teach for subjectification (in which each and every student may appear as *someone* rather than *something*)?” and “How do teachers teach for subjectification to occur?”²⁴ Educationists, through the translation process, consider what questions and understandings become possible when we see psychological questions in terms of educational questions.²⁵

21. Bellmann, “Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?”

22. Foster McMurray, “Preface to an Autonomous Discipline of Education,” *Educational Theory* 5, no. 3 (1955): 140; and Agnes Tellings, “Eclecticism and Integration in Educational Theories: A Metatheoretical Analysis,” *Educational Theory* 51, no. 3 (2001): 277–292.

23. Erling Lars Dale, *Kunnskapsregimer i pedagogikk og utdanningsvitenskap* [Regimes of knowledge in pedagogy and educational sciences] (Oslo, Norway: Abstrakt forlag, 2005).

24. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*.

25. See also Claudia W. Ruitenberg, “Distance and Defamiliarization: Translation as Philosophical Method,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 3 (2009): 421–435.

EDUCATION AS TASK (ETK)

So far, I have argued that ESS can be regarded as a source of knowledge for SE, where noneducational knowledge is, by way of ETN, translated into educational knowledge. Thereby, instead of letting other disciplines rule over education, one allows SE itself to govern the knowledge production. This is a crucial component to safeguarding the autonomy of education. But ensuring that education is a self-governing discipline of education requires giving SE space to work on its own, independently of ESS. Thus, SE's role cannot be limited to mediating among other disciplines. If that were the case, SE would be totally dependent on those other disciplines. A very important task in safeguarding the autonomy of SE, therefore, is to develop and produce knowledge and theory that is educationally unique. Accomplishing this requires approaching research on education-related concepts and situations specifically from an educational perspective. Overall, SE should aim to develop, both theoretically and empirically, knowledge and theory that are uniquely educational. By this means, SE can stand forth as autonomous, as educators and educationists are not forced to borrow ideas and theories from external sources and thus to surrender the educational cause.²⁶ The question is how SE may be organized in order to ensure that it functions as a strong, autonomous discipline that produces knowledge and theory that is educationally unique.

In addressing this question, one cannot overlook that education is a compound and complex discipline that includes many research objects. For example, historical educational texts may be subjected to the development of educational theory,²⁷ while educational policy documents may be subjected to critical assessments,²⁸ and so on. In this context, and for the sake of my argument, I will relate to EP as a research object and a source for the development of educational knowledge and theory. Thus, EP as research object appears as a major component in the organization of SE. In such an organization, the knowledge developed is both educationally unique and scientifically founded, ensuring that SE emerges as a strong, autonomous discipline. Let me elaborate on this, first by defining EP.

EP, the source of educational knowledge and theory, is a very complex field that can be understood in many different ways. For example, EP can be understood in an instrumental and technical way, where the teacher strives to teach in such a way that the learning outcomes can be controlled and foreseen from the very beginning. According to Stephen Kemmis and Christine Edwards-Groves, EP is governed by two purposes: one relates to individuals and the other to societies. This double purpose of education is about (1) the person and (2) this person's relationship to the world. Specifically, education consists in interrelated aims of providing an

26. Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education*, 38.

27. Daniel Tröhler, *Languages of Education: Protestant Legacies, National Identities, and Global Aspirations* (London: Routledge, 2011).

28. Stephen J. Ball, *The Education Debate* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2017).

education for the good of the person and an education for the good of humankind.²⁹ This means that teachers, in their attempts to achieve this double purpose, must act in certain ways in collaboration with the students.³⁰

ETK refers to reflections on EP conducted by researchers with the help of educational theory. This is how educational knowledge is developed based on theory and reflection.³¹ ETK is also a firsthand experience, as the examination and reflection occurs from the inside of practice itself, conducted by those who have direct access to EP.³² Most often, teachers are the ones with direct access to the field of EP, but in some cases — for example, situations that involve action research — educational researchers may have direct access to it as well. Since the aim is to develop and improve EP, the educational knowledge garnered through this process has a normative function, providing purposes and directions for the educational actions. ETK thus appears as a task and follows a logic in which purposes and means are prominent. Where shall we go? What kind of means should we use to reach where we want to go? This backdrop reveals two differences between ESS and ETK. Where ESS provides room for studying EP from disciplines that may have no historical connection to education, ETK examines EP based on educational theory. In other words, ETK examines EP by way of educational theory, thus developing knowledge that is educationally unique so as to ensure that SE is not subsumed by premises from other disciplines. As a result, it makes safeguarding the autonomy of SE possible.

Still, in some cases it may be fruitful to supplement educational knowledge developed through EP with knowledge obtained from other disciplines. Hence, ETN is relevant. For example, if it is appropriate to examine the individual — specifically, the person's psychic responses — in an educational situation, psychological perspectives may be included in the educational research. In this respect, questions beginning with "how" and "when" may be appropriate: How do the students acquire knowledge? How do children learn reading skills? When should teachers introduce basic reading lessons? When should teachers praise and when

29. Stephen Kemmis and Christine Edwards-Groves, *Understanding Education: History, Politics, and Practice* (Berlin: Springer, 2018), 27.

30. For an elaboration of the concept of EP, see Herner Saeverot and Vegard Kvam, "An Alternative Model of Researching Educational Practice: A Pedagogic-Stereoscopic Point of View," *British Journal of Educational Research* 45, no. 1 (2019): 201–218.

31. Lawrence Stenhouse, *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (London: Heinemann, 1975); Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge, and Action Research* (London: Falmer, 1986); Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle, *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); and Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kelly Donnell, "Practitioner Inquiry: Blurring the Boundaries of Research and Practice," in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, ed. Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, and Patricia B. Elmore (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 503–518.

32. Wilhelm Flitner, *Das Selbstverständnis der Erziehungswissenschaft in der Gegenwart* [The self-understanding of educational science in the present time] (Heidelberg, Germany: Quelle & Meyer, 1966).

should they criticize? Beyond these educational-psychological questions, one can imagine questions beginning with “what” as also relevant. For example, one might ask these educational-philosophical questions: What does it mean to learn? What does it mean to be educated? From the perspective of education’s autonomy, it is necessary to analyze and organize such questions, as well as problems and research results from the various perspectives of education (for example, psychological and philosophical perspectives), into a functional unit in which education serves as an overarching frame. For example, the psychologically and philosophically oriented questions can be analyzed and organized according to different educational questions and interests, such as these: What is the purpose of education? How might students find their place in the world as subjects? How is it possible to conduct an education for the good of the person and an education for the good of humankind?

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AS A STRONG DISCIPLINE

ETK is a normative activity, as the research object is studied on the basis of practice theory relating to norms or “criteria”; for example, with contributions from John Dewey’s pragmatic education. The norms and criteria are established in order to, among other things, determine and clarify what it is that makes an action educational. The aim of ETK is ultimately to improve EP, or, more specifically, to investigate whether the practice of the preestablished “criteria,” in relation to each other, is useful or not. In other words, ETK aims at legitimizing the research object from a pragmatic and normative perspective.

However, ETK’s pragmatic and reflective research is not sufficient on its own; there is need for additional research using scientific methods, such as phenomenological, hermeneutical, and dialectical methods (which are often used in combination with each other).³³ The reason for this is that ETK produces educational theory in a weak sense.³⁴ While theory in a weak sense may refer to perceptions or knowledge structures that are too loose or poorly articulated to be designed as strong theory, theory in a strong sense is knowledge that has undergone thorough scientific verification and substantiation in light of established theories and methods.³⁵ In other words, the weak theory that has been developed through ETK needs more scientific and educational support and processing. Therefore, SE cannot only rely on ETK alone. On one hand, ETK has many advantages, not least that the researcher has direct insight into EP. On the other hand, this research contains many scientific problems and may therefore prevent the development of theory in a strong sense, in other words, theory that is well-founded.³⁶ In addition to the problem that the knowledge is insufficiently substantiated, another problem is that the researcher, whether educator or educationist, is so close to EP that

33. Ibid.

34. Tone Kvernbekk, *Pedagogisk teoridannelse* [Construction of pedagogical theory] (Bergen, Norway: Fagbokforlaget, 2005).

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

there is greater risk that his or her subjective beliefs will influence the research findings.³⁷ This can be explained by the distinction between an autobiography and a biography. Through the genre of autobiography, the authors write about themselves. In writing from the inside, authors are likely to color the story with subjective beliefs and ideas. This problem is less an issue in the genre of biography, as the main character of the story is described from the outside. In other words, there is greater distance between the author and the subjectivity of the main character.

One way to solve this problem is to consider ETK as one source of strong theory. The practice-based knowledge and theory that has been developed by way of reflections should be examined in more detail, as it is weak. If we want this weak theory to be well and thoroughly articulated, and to support the development a sustainable and strong theory, other forms of research are required. The weak knowledge or theory that has been developed through ETK requires additional theoretical processing. Thus, further research that is theory-based rather than practice-based must also be conducted. The reason is that the research object of theory in the strong sense — which is ETH, as I will discuss next — is educational (and weak) theory, consequently EP is no longer the direct research object.

EDUCATION AS TRUTH (ETH): CAN WE IMAGINE AN EDUCATION HAVING NO (DIRECT) INTEREST IN PRACTICE?

As ETK focuses on the improvement of EP, which is a pragmatic interest, theory has a prescriptive and normative function: its object is to determine what should be. Important issues within ETK are thus often value-based: Are the desired values realized? Will children and young people realize their potential both as individuals and as members of community? ETK is about thinking with, and setting norms for, EP.³⁸

ETH's interest, on the other hand, is not to improve practice. Within this sub-area of SE, theory has a descriptive, analytic, and explanatory function, where the object is to describe, analyze, and explain what is and what has been. It is about showing and explicating a phenomenon, in particular ETK, which must in turn be explicated theoretically.³⁹ This part of the research is about developing educational theory in a strong sense for the purpose of strengthening SE as an autonomous discipline. ETH may be developed by those who conduct this research directly in practice, in one and the same paper; or ETH research can be done by other educational researchers, preferably through studies involving several researchers. Such an approach, rather than just replacing one educational theory with another,

37. Hannah Farrimond, "The Ethics of Research," in *The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research*, ed. Dominic Wyse, Neil Selwyn, Emma Smith, and Larry E. Suter (London: SAGE, 2016), 72–89.

38. Rudolf Lochner, "Zur Grundlegung einer selbständigen Erziehungswissenschaft" [Foundations for an independent science of education], *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 6, no. 1 (1960): 1–21.

39. Bellmann, "Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?," 114.

supports theory development as a “co-operative endeavor by many experts to build upon one another’s findings and to pass them on for further refinements and additions.”⁴⁰

In ETK and ETH, therefore, we have two widely differing perspectives on education, and the question is how these two approaches may relate to one another. I suggest psychoanalysis as a metaphor that may help to explain the relationship. On the inside (as a client), one may understand the phenomenon (one’s mental condition), but it may be hard to explain and describe the phenomenon. On the outside (as an analyst), one may explain and describe the phenomenon, but it may be difficult to understand the phenomenon. Through the interaction between the client, who understands the matter from the inside, and the analyst, who describes and explains the phenomenon from the outside, a stereoscopic — that is, a broader and more holistic — perspective on the client’s mental state can be developed. The same can be said of the interaction between ETK and ETH, where the former is primarily based on understandings of EP and the latter is primarily based on describing and explaining the knowledge developed by way of ETK. Let me give an example. Through ETK, there is an understanding that teachers often use direct pedagogy (such as feedback and praise) when students acquire knowledge, and they are more likely to use indirect pedagogy (for example, questions and irony) when they want to challenge students on a subjective-existential level.⁴¹ This particular knowledge can then be drawn into ETH by applying theories and models that explain how underlying causes may lead to different patterns of action on the part of the teacher, in this case with regard to direct and indirect pedagogy. Another approach may be that ETH makes use of theories and models that explain different patterns of action based on teachers’ intentions regarding their actions. As educational researchers who are connected to ETH only indirectly influence EP, their findings can indirectly inform, adjust, or perhaps support and develop the actions teachers take in practice.

As the example implies, researching ETH is a second-order, or indirect, observation of EP, which has also been examined via ETK and its direct reflections on practice.⁴² Following Kemmis,⁴³ ETH takes the spectator perspective and ETK takes the participant perspective. The crucial point is that researchers working from the angle of ETH have to imaginatively take the perspective of those working from the angle of ETK, so as to know what EP is about. In other words, to grasp the normative stakes relevant in education, the researcher as spectator has to imaginatively take the perspective of the researcher as participant. Metaphorically, it

40. McMurray, “Preface to an Autonomous Discipline of Education,” 131.

41. For an elaboration on direct and indirect pedagogy, see Herner Saeverot, “Indirect Teaching,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Art and Design Education*, vol. 3, ed. John Baldacchino, Kerry Freedman, and Richard Hickman (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019).

42. Kemmis, “Researching Educational Praxis”; and Bellmann, “Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?”

43. Kemmis, “Researching Educational Praxis”

is like a detective who talks to witnesses in order to solve a crime.⁴⁴ Although the researcher strives to be neutral and observational, prescribing and normative elements will be part of the explication, through subjective choices and assessments. It is not possible to be completely neutral and objective as an educational researcher (or as any researcher, for that matter). Thus, all those who research in the context of ETH must have a critical viewpoint, not least aimed at their own research activities.⁴⁵ This critique could be aimed at, for instance, educational methods and guidelines that are based on political and/or ideological views. Alongside this self-criticism, researchers must also be open to criticism from other researchers.⁴⁶

Furthermore, ETH is motivated by questions of truth.⁴⁷ By truth, I do not mean a universal truth. Truth in the context of ETH emerges by examining ETK. What proves to be valid, whether on a small or big scale, is regarded as truth, which is valid until it is modified or completely falsified by new investigations. Here are some examples of potential questions of truth: How may practice-based knowledge/weak theory become valid (in a strong sense)? Is it possible to generalize practical-educational knowledge? Can that which has been learned on a relatively small scale (and therefore validated on a small scale) be related more broadly? By way of different and suitable theories and methods — for example, explanatory theories and observations — the researcher strives to test whether practice-based knowledge may be valid or not.

TOWARD A STRONG AND AN AUTONOMOUS DISCIPLINE OF EDUCATION?

The practice-based knowledge/weak theory that has been developed may, after it has been subjected to validity assessments, be developed into educational theory in a strong sense. Educational theory is thus developed through (1) ETK as a firsthand experience in which practice-based knowledge and theory is derived directly from EP, and (2) ETH as a secondhand experience in which theory-based knowledge is derived directly from practice-based knowledge.⁴⁸ Although this educational theory can be said to be strong, it can never be absolutely true or valid. Given this, I suggest that educational researchers take the role of ironists, who, according to Rorty, “are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and

44. See also Bellmann, “Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?”

45. Dietrich Benner, Michelle Borelli, Frieda Heyting, and Cristopher Winch, eds., *Kritik in der Pädagogik. Versuche über das Kritische in Erziehung und Erziehungswissenschaft* [Critique in pedagogy. Attempts at critical aspects in pedagogy and the science of education] (Weinheim, Germany: Beltz Verlag, 2003).

46. Ibid.

47. Wolfgang Sünkel, *Erziehungsbegriff und Erziehungsverhältnis: Allgemeine Theorie der Erziehung* [Concept of education and educational relationship: A general theory of education] (Weinheim, Germany: Beltz, 2013).

48. This process of knowledge production can be found in the Continental *Pädagogik* tradition; or, more specifically, in what in German is called *Erziehungswissenschaft*. However, this tradition is under pressure from, *inter alia*, ESS (see Bellmann, “Forwards to the Learning Sciences or Back to Pedagogy?”).

fragility of their final vocabularies."⁴⁹ The educational theory developed by the means described here can only be temporarily true. This means that educational theory — for that matter, *any* theory — must be retested whenever new information, knowledge, and insights come to light. In some cases, educational theory may have to be redescribed based on new findings, or, as McMurray points out, in light of the "obligation of an educational theorist is to refine the vocabulary of his own discipline."⁵⁰ In other cases, educational theory may even be completely rejected. New documentation, as well as critical and confrontational observations, can reveal weaknesses in the theory and perhaps force the researchers to redescribe or reject what has been considered as established knowledge.

Overall, ETH strengthens the autonomy of SE as a discipline as educational theory (in a weak sense) is investigated. Instead of being one-eyed, viewing EP through only one lens, SE now has a stereoscopic view from the perspectives of both the participant and the spectator. While the former perspective develops knowledge directly from EP, the latter perspective examines this knowledge based on questions about facts, truth, and validity. In this way, SE can appear as a strong and self-governing discipline, with the right to organize its own activities and make independent decisions, which in turn addresses the problem of other disciplines invading education and imposing their perspectives as primary. But what about politics? Can education be positioned outside politics?

If we address this latter question from the point of view of EP, the answer is no. The simple reason for this is that the practical actions are guided by education's abovementioned double purpose: education is concerned with the good for individuals who are committed to the good for humankind.⁵¹ As such, "education is at once both a moral and a political activity."⁵² However, an autonomous discipline of education cannot allow for the intervention of politics in the research process; rather, it is necessary to create and preserve space for educational research's "objective" and critical function.⁵³ For instance, the "objective" and critical task of educational research, which I addressed above, cannot take place if political decisions are made before the actual research has been done. This does not mean that politics should have nothing to do with educational research or that educational researchers do not have a social responsibility. It is instead about knowing *when* politics and community discussions should be part of the educational research. Above all, politics must not interfere with the actual research process;

49. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 74.

50. McMurray, "Preface to an Autonomous Discipline of Education," 133.

51. Kemmis and Edwards-Groves, *Understanding Education*, 2.

52. *Ibid.*, 150.

53. Benner et al., *Kritik in der Pädagogik*.

politics, as well as community debates, should be part of the process only *after* the research is completed and when the conclusions have been drawn.⁵⁴ Why so?

Take as an example the following thought experiment. Does information and communications technology (ICT) promote better education than other educational resources? From there, we can imagine that the results of a research project show that other educational resources have better educative effects than ICT. Since political interests often favor ICT for education, the findings of this project may be seen as conflicting with political interests. The point is that research can offer results opposed to the dominant political agenda.⁵⁵ Given this possibility, there must be, in order to safeguard the autonomy of education, room for research to explore educational questions and problems without political interference. Once the research has been completed, there should be opportunities for political involvement and debates. In this particular case, one might, for example, debate the following question: To what extent should society use digital equipment and technology resources in schools considering that research shows that resources other than ICT produce better educational outcomes for students? In some cases, it may not be possible to draw broadly accepted conclusions from such debates, and perhaps more research on ICT and its educational implications is needed in order to reach political conclusions. Overall, education should be given space to be autonomous and self-governing. One should therefore privilege aim of ensuring that educational research can work on its own premises rather than taking up the premises of politics. Such an approach will not only weaken the possibilities for political and ideological interference in the research process, but it will also strengthen the autonomy of education as a discipline.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that in order to become a strong and autonomous discipline, education needs to restructure and reorganize its ways of conducting research. EP is the main research object, being examined from multiple perspectives. For example, ESS develops knowledge and theory on a variety of disciplines through examining EP in those disciplinary areas. Since ESS do not generate educational knowledge, this disciplinary knowledge must be translated into educationally relevant knowledge through ETN. Although this translation helps to secure the autonomy of SE, the latter is still dependent on other disciplines. Hence, SE is not entirely self-governing. Therefore, EP should be examined from the point of view of *education* in addition to psychology, sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines. This process occurs through ETK, which produces educational theory directly from EP. Although, in this sense, SE appears to be an autonomous discipline, the educational knowledge that is developed is relatively weak. Hence, there is a need to strengthen this knowledge, making it into an educational theory in a strong sense. This is accomplished through ETH, which has indirect access to EP.

54. Ibid.

55. Jonathan Bishop, *Transforming Politics and Policy in the Digital Age* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2014).

To ensure that SE can emerge as a strong and autonomous discipline, educators and educationists must have, as Dewey implied, the courage to raise clear educational questions, and not to combine and mix knowledge from different disciplines in the first place.⁵⁶ Of course, it is not always easy to set clear boundaries between different disciplines, yet doing so should be a goal, despite a rather common assertion that the establishment of disciplinary boundaries itself is what creates the need to protect these boundaries.⁵⁷ Like Johannes Bellmann, I consider such an argument to be naïve.⁵⁸ My argument, rather, is that education, and other disciplines as well, should be strong and autonomous before collaborating with other disciplines. Otherwise, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to develop knowledge that is distinctive for each discipline. Allowing education to strengthen itself as a self-governing discipline entails that it has something unique to offer research in and on EP, alongside unique contributions from other disciplines. This will also give respect back to education, and to those who are connected with that discipline, including educators and educationists.⁵⁹

56. Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education*.

57. See also Johannes Bellmann, "The Changing Field of Educational Studies and the Task of Theorizing Education," in *Making a Difference in Theory*, eds. Biesta, Allan, and Edwards, 65–81.

58. *Ibid.*

59. See also Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education*, 38.