

Theoretical Basis Of Teaching Foreign Languages

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Annotation. The prosperity of educational theory is deeply connected with the expansion of mass education and the elevation of teacher education when reviewing the overall history of education in the West. Similarly, the issue of educational theory has also become an exciting centre of interest for the Chinese as its enterprise of public education was carried out substantially within the past century. And this ascending quest for educational theory is far from its end, at least in current China: the prominent movement calling for realistic educational research or empirical sciences of education was just announced in January 2017, gathering around 32 related institutes of education all over China to strengthen the scientific study of education (see ECNU Manifesto of the positivist educational research), meanwhile ‘philosophy of education’ has been coined as a core course in the country’s new teacher education (see Document Teacher [2011]6, Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China). Furthermore, two international educational journals—the ECNU Review of Education (ROE)¹ by the East China Normal University and the Beijing International Review of Education (BIRE) by the Beijing Normal University—have recently been established in China while published in English. It writes clearly in their scopes that both conceptual and empirical works in education are encouraged. Anyway, in an age when the practice of modern education is popular, robust educational theories, be they speculative or scientific, are certainly highly expected and will continue to be important.

Key words: language, rule, grammar, method, theory, function, practice

Introduction

On the other hand, regarding what educational theory is, what are the nature and function of theory, and its relationship with practice, etc. there have already been contentious discussions in the field. For example, in accordance with the analytic philosophers of education, there are at least four kinds of foundational educational theory: philosophy of education, sociology of education, psychology of education, and history of education (Tibble 1966; Hirst 1983). Surely there are other promising theories which come from neuroscience and big-data analyses when applied in education. However, as in the Chinese context depicted above where various kinds of educational theory are relatively equally encouraging, this paper will pay its attention to the philosophical style of theory of education.

According to Hou’s (2011) systematic examination of Western educational scholarship imported in China during the past century, ‘philosophy of education’ was firstly received in 1917 among other 44 imported disciplinary studies on education (p. 29). Since then, ‘philosophy of education’ in China has undergone over a 100 years journey, during which not only great Western educators, such as Comenius and Pestalozzi, Herbart and Dewey, Humboldt and Freire,^{Footnote3} have been well familiarised, but so also have influential educational thoughts e.g., Experimentelle Pädagogik (Experimental Pedagogy), Kulturpädagogik (about Bildung), Progressivism, Perennialism, Essentialism, and Reconstructionism. In the centurial reflection, the Chinese academic community, in particular the Chinese society of philosophy of education has been becoming increasingly concerned with (1)

indigenous theories, which would suit modern China particularly while are not necessarily parochial; (2) theories in effective relations to the frontline practice (Yu and Qin 2009; Hou 2011; Shi 2014). While emphasising the indigeneness and the effectiveness of theory, it does not mean the value of the ongoing study from counterparts in the West has been undermined. Rather, a good understanding of Western (though mostly Euro-American) philosophy of education has always been strengthened, especially those critical events and peak experiences. With such a Chinese learning concern, I therefore intend to delve into two valuable traditions of critique—both contemporaneous and complementary—in Western philosophy of education spanning the 1960s to the 1980s: the practical theory of education in the Anglophone tradition and the critical theory of education in the Continental world.

In what follows, I will introduce the two critical models of philosophic educational theory—namely, analytic practical educational theory and German Critical Pädagogik—one after another by focusing on their complementary differences. That is, in Section I and Section II, contrasts between their characteristic rationalities, their typical forms of criticism and the corresponding ways to be deployed in critique, as well as their frames of reference regarding the sources of their criticalities, will be respectively examined. For a summary of simplified points of comparison and contrast see Table 1 (Appendix) attached. Finally, in Section III, I will argue for their intrinsic value, practical value, and epistemic value when they are put in juxtaposition. In particular, the distinctiveness and the complementary quality that they encompass add vitally to the understanding of Western construction of educational knowledge which is divided into two camps: one the foundational and the other the autonomous.

Frankly speaking, just as the understanding of the distinction between the two main convincing paradigms of the configuration of educational studies is not yet clear and systematic in the West, such understanding is neither absolutely

conscious in the Chinese community. Let alone applying this understanding to analyse the generation of educational knowledge. However, scholars do start to search for a fine-grained account of comparison and contrast between the two paradigms, besides the Biesta 2011 paper and the work done in China, also see Westbury, Hopmann, and Riquarts (2000). In particular, Westbury in his Chapter 1 of the same book systematically analyse the characteristics and the differences between ‘Didaktik’ and ‘Curriculum’. He explains how the Anglophone paradigm and the European paradigm deal with the similar questions of teaching, learning, teacher education in different ways.

Admittedly, it is not easy at the moment to find many examined examples to illustrate the existence and necessity of the coexistence of two sensible paradigms of educational studies. Otherwise, our understanding and knowledge of the two camps of educational scholarship would be much more advanced. Nevertheless, the exploration by Westbury et al. (2000) of a teaching and learning dimension is persuasive, demonstrating that there are indeed two systems, and each can learn from each other. Such an analysis on ‘Didaktik’ and ‘Curriculum’ counts a piece of peak experiences in educational scholarship, because it sustains and develops, and thereby constitutes a detailed understanding of the contents of the two paradigms of educational studies. In addition, they are accessible, classical presentations of the establishments accumulated in the two traditions to serve professional training and teaching purposes. In these terms, the analytic practical educational theory and the German critical pädagogik counts as another piece of peak experiences. Briefly, it is because they successfully illustrate how the two systems manifest the same critical dimension into two different self-legitimated forms which are at the same time inter-sustaining.

The critical theory of education that we focus on was developed in Germany from the 1960s to the 1980s (Peng 2002, p. 52; Masschelein 2004, p. 352; Biesta 2005, pp. 143–145), the same time period when the model of practical educational theory was prominent in the Anglo-Saxon

world. Certainly, in many other aspects they have similarities, such as achieving human freedom composed of self-determined individuals and a common vigilant attitude towards the outside world (i.e., a shared worldview that things are not what they look like). Even the key terms of ‘practical’ and ‘critical’ as characterising each of them are interchangeable—the German critical theory of education complies with the criteria of practical theory as set in the above analytic conception, since its key issue in criticising the authoritarian structure within schools for a real society of equality and democracy (Chang 2008, p. 131) is essentially of praxis. Likewise, the analytic practical theory of education inclined towards a rational examination is no doubt of critical style, and thus a rationalistic sort of critical theory of education. However, the main reason to put them in parallel is not because of their commonalities, but more owing to their distinctive yet complementary roles in typifying criticalities, rationalities, and practicalities. Hence, in this paper the aspects of their significant difference will be focused. By consulting related literature published in Chinese or in English, I will try to present an account of the German critical pädagogik in contrast with the analytic clarification of practical theory of education.

First, compared with the analysts’ passionate inspiration to a higher level of intellectual rigor, the German critical pedagogues’ primary concern is rather axiological and thereby practical in actions. It aims at the prevention of Auschwitz and the deconstruction of authoritarian culture in the post-WWII German society, and at a further step the emancipation of the individual and the society by individual criticality exercised towards the existing social order (Lenzen 1997, p. 4; Heyting and Winch 2004, p. 315; Biesta 2005, p. 143; Chang 2008, p. 131; Winkler 2017, p. 69).^{Footnote10} The emphasis of the German critical pädagogik on the social and political context also has its origin within the German pedagogy tradition. In the 1960s, critical pädagogik by exercising its social-axiological critique played a role in resisting the then dominant ideas of pedagogy as a hermeneutic science (geisteswissenschaftliche pädagogik) which

over-emphasised individual-internalised understanding and as the positivism in educational research which was indulged into casual relationships (Chang 2008, pp. 135–139; Liang 2010, p. 962; Tröhler 2013, p. 59; Winkler 2017, pp. 69–70). Eventually, the legitimate place of value is not only recognised in educational inquiries by the efforts of the critical pedagogues, but also the critique and examination of those imbedded values are also ensured.^{Footnote11}

Whereas the analytic practical theory asks questions about epistemic adequacy, the German critical pädagogik is directly preoccupied with its value critique e.g., questions of social justice and emancipation. That is, the German critical model exercises axiological critique, investigating power relationship in institutional and societal level, and addressing significant larger issues such as the hidden interest, the constructed epistemology and the real effect in practice. Further, in comparison with the analytic rationality of the practical model, the characteristic rationality exemplified by the continental critical model is a sort of axiological rationality. When dubbed ‘analytic rationality’, it does not mean all about logical and conceptual scrutiny and nothing about discussions of value, as we can see in the analytic practical model moral evaluation is involved as one part of its criticisms. By the same token, when exemplifying the axiological rationality, as the critical pedagogues always ask, ‘Who benefit?’, ‘Is what is implemented really educational?’ and assume a stance of ‘not to be deceived by the hidden’, it does not mean examination of factual information can be excluded. Fairly speaking, the analytic rationality and the axiological rationality are both indispensable parts for each; it is a matter about ‘ratio’—while the practical theory of education prioritises the former and the critical theory of education is more associated with the latter.

As a second point about the concrete forms of criticism that the critical pedagogues adopt, it consists generally of five ways (see Benner’s categorisations, 1999, pp. 38–41)

1. Rational criticism (the representative thinker is Karl Popper);
2. Reflective hermeneutics (to explain the existing prejudices and aim at reconstruction);
3. Ideology critique (on basis of hermeneutic reflection with a further step to seek alternatives);
4. Practical critique (the object of critique to be extended to what Benner categorises into the other five forms of practice—i.e., economics, politics, art, morality, religion—together with the educational realm, they are constitutive of human life);
5. Transcendental critique (a critique of the above four forms which reminds what is beyond human thinking and meanwhile cannot be simply believed in).

However, alongside the three sorts of criticism purposed by the analytic practical theory, the crux is not how many categories we have successfully identified but how we conceive the relationships among them, as revealed by the German critical lens. It is very interesting that the relationships among these five sorts of criticism in the German critical exercise is neither selective nor of complementary synthesis, as suggested by Benner (1999, p. 42). Instead of the monopolisation of one form of critique, ‘a pluralization of critique that interchangeably applies the competing approaches [of critique] to each other’ is implied (Benner and English 2004, p. 421). Put another way, these critiques are placed in a triad of pre-critical, critical and post-critical tension, rather than a dichotomy between critical and the uncritical (see Benner and English 2004, p. 422). It is thus obviously different from the three sorts of examination in the analytic practical model, which are applied selectively in accordance with the nature of the object examined, e.g., differentiating the factual from the evaluative. Let alone a differentiation between the critical and the uncritical (e.g., right from wrong and true from false) for the sake of basic epistemic clarity that is acclaimed in the analytic practical model of critique. Further, for the German critical *pädagogik*, the criticality

exists in the relationships among theory, empirical world, and praxis where the above five forms of criticism are accommodated and function in a holistic (three-dimensional) way. Put alternatively, it is to connect rather general ideals and insights with concrete, empirical facts and observations in a given educational situation (Winkler 2017, p. 64), in which five forms of criticism could work organically and criticise powerfully.

Related to such a holistic criticality, the question of sources of criticism, which sustains this particular theoretical configuration, also attends. While in the Anglophone tradition the inter-/multi-disciplinary approach provides resources for justifications and the critical competence of the teacher is concomitantly requisite, critical educational theorists in the European tradition rely on a vantage point to diagnose and to reveal the problems and shortcomings which prevent the realisation of liberty (Masschelein 2004, p. 355). Regarding such privileged attitudes or higher values, Winkler (2017, pp. 66–69) identifies ten roots in the German critical *pädagogik* which cultivate the intellectual vitality to critique. Winkler’s list is not intended to be exhaustive, but it is worth to be listed here as illustrations of the prominent foundations of the German critical tradition: (1) Thomas Morus’ (1478–1535) and Tommaso Campanella’s (1568–1639) optimism and utopia on betterment of the world; (2) the early humanism on human dignity; (3) capitalists’ ideal of personal autonomy; (4) Enlightenment rationality; (5) Democracy; (6) *Bildung* (the subjective and objective relationships among individual, society and culture); (7) romantic philosophy; (8) a strong connection between morality and aesthetics; (9) the early writings of Marx and the critics of political economy; (10) psychologists’, such as Jean Piaget’s and Lev Vygotsky’s theories on the interaction of human brain and outer experiences. Additionally, the most visible source could be related to the more recent Frankfurt school—thinkers like T.W. Adorno and J. Habermas (Peng 2002, p. 52; Masschelein 2004, p. 353; Biesta 2011, p. 187; Tröhler 2013, p. 59). In short, the critical educational theorists in the German paradigm

rely on a conception of education which is initially cultivated by various strands of thought such as listed above, forming a base for further exercise of their criticality (Winkler [2017](#), p. 64; Biesta [2011](#), p. 190). This is in contrast with the analytic understanding of education, which is resultant and generated throughout rational procedures and examinations by applying multi/inter-disciplinary studies.

Certainly, this uniqueness of framing sources of criticism in the German critical theory of education is inseparable from its wider configuration of academic educational study in the European tradition. As the Europe emanates an apparent independence of educational study by its association with the relative autonomy of educational practice (Biesta [2011](#), p. 187; Tröhler [2013](#), pp. 51–52), the autonomous educational study works on its own forms of theorising and conceptual structures (see the Continental various versions of ‘General Pedagogy’). Just as Hordern ([2018](#), p. 589) further explains, it is ‘[such] a distinct disciplinary tradition of specifically educational thought [i.e., in the Germany] powered by educational concepts that can have resonance in practice’. Thus, while the analytic practical theory derives reasons from interdisciplinary studies—first using scientific or reflective theories of fundamental disciplines to justify, and then relying on professional teachers’ comprehensive understanding of theories to act in education, the German critical theorists situate within an intra-disciplinary design to address education more directly.

All in all, the German critical theory of education in the Continental-European educational scholarship manifest its criticality towards education in a holistic and axiological way, emphatically analysing the relation at a given historical stage between individual subjects and societies, and cultures. Compared with the Anglophone-Analytic paradigm, the continental critical model is associated with the educational inquiry as an independent field while is not necessarily detached from other studies related to education. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of the

Anglophone tradition and of the European tradition can also be seen through the writing styles of their scholars. For instance, if the work by Burbules ([1992](#)) is juxtaposed with that by Benner ([1999](#)), even translated in a third language, say Chinese, the difference is vivid—in the sense that discussing the same topic how the Anglophone scholar writes with a high level of clarity, while the European scholar writes at a macroscopically inspiring way.

Three Contributing Points of Comparing and Contrasting the Two Critical Models

There are three contributing points that can be made explicit when the two contrasting critical models are put in juxtaposition. First, it is concerned with the immanent value of coexistence—each one a kind of worthwhile critique on its own terms, and most importantly when put together they are complementary. Secondly, it is about their practical value in exemplifying the unique construction of academic educational studies, which has respectively developed in the Anglo-American world (mainly the UK and the USA) and in the European world (Germany, Belgium, Finland, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.). Thirdly, alongside other equivalent knowledge-achievements accomplished in the two main convincing paradigms of educational studies in the West, the two critical contributions can be counted as peak scholarly experiences. Consistent with the accounts developed in Section I and II, I will continue to draw upon relevant, existing research literature to develop my arguments. This also includes some related observations coming from and analyses made by contemporary Chinese educational scholars.

The Value of Being Complementary When the Two Self-legitimated Models are Put in Parallel

Burbules and Berk ([1999](#), pp. 58–59) argue for the benefit of the coexistence of both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy in terms of the sustained difference—intellectual vitality that they yield while made in juxtaposition. Certainly, Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy in Burbules and Berk’s context do not wholly equal to the practical and the critical model in this

paper. Since Burbules and Berk's work concerns with a period between the 1980s and the 2000s, while here it relates to two decades before the 1980s. However, there are indeed similarities in arguing for coexistence.

First, this owes to the similar orientation shared both by the practical educational theory and Critical Thinking; that is, both of them are concerned characteristically with epistemic adequacy, e.g., valid argument, supporting evidence, and conceptual clarity. As Oancea and Bridges (2009, p. 556) summarise, this analytic rationality aims at differentiating the logical from the rhetorical, the normative from the factual, tautology from circularity, and correlation from causality, meanwhile pays particular attention to examine if there are category mistakes or counter arguments. Doubtless, the practical model is thus one kind of worthwhile critique on these terms. On the other hand, since the critical *pädagogik* characterises itself by discerning the particular ways that undue power exercises in institutional and societal levels, the normative rationality that it encompasses is complementary to the practical model's epistemic criticality.

Secondly, as both models of educational theory are concerned with right ways to do in concrete practices, there is another form of being complementary. That is, their practicalities are supplementary to each other. Whereas the understanding of 'being right' interpreted by the analytic-practical model is primarily centred on justification (in thinking), on the part of the continental-critical model it is mostly around justice (in action). Further, whilst the German model places its holistic criticism among a realistic triad of theory, empirical world, and praxis, the analytic tradition emphasises the critical function performed by the most important educational practitioners—teachers—as an indispensable part. The last but not the least, the explicit division between the critical and the uncritical as implied in the analytic-practical paradigm is regarded as elementary, in comparison with more complicated tensions among the pre-critical, the critical and the post-critical intended in the German tradition.

Taken together, the practical and critical theories of education as depicted are inter-sustaining. On the one hand, both of them share the very same consideration of 'being critical' towards education either in theory or in practice, aiming at 'overcoming ignorance' and 'discerning distortions'. On the other hand, with the same aim but complementary approaches—different priority of the epistemic and the axiological; different emphasis on the realistic structure and the frontline practitioners—the two can beneficially add to each other when facing common challenges (e.g., the postmodern accusation of the deficiency of rationality) or realising the shared ambition (i.e., human emancipation). Hence, it is obvious that both the practical theory and the critical theory have their own legitimate value in exercising criticality and practicality. Significantly, while placed in parallel, their distinctiveness with excellent complementary traits makes them invaluable for the training and the teaching of Western Philosophy of Education as a discipline. This is a reason to call them peak academic experiences which I will further explain.

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