Facing epistemic uncertainty: characteristics, possibilities, and limitations of a discursive contextualist approach to philosophy of education
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BEYOND FOUNDATIONS - SIGNS OF A NEW NORMATIVITY IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

1. Introduction
How philosophy of education can contribute to practical educational thinking partly depends on available methodological resources. Consequently, any revision of established philosophical approaches might require reformulation of the practical relevance one attaches to philosophy of education. Philosophical developments of the past decades seem to affect one of the main tasks traditionally attributed to philosophy of education: that it should contribute to the formulation and justification of the founding principles of education (Snik et al, 1994). However, accomplishing this task presupposes a model of philosophical justification that has been under discussion for several decades now.

To illustrate this model of justification, I take an example from De Ruyter (2003). She claims the importance of passing on ideals in education (Y), and substantiates this claim with the proposition that ideals are indispensable guides for finding meaning in life (X). In other words, she justifies her claim (Y) by reducing it to another claim (X) that is presented as a (more) reliable one. De Ruyter departs from an anthropological foundation, which ascribes specific essential characteristics to human nature that are presented as undisputed and therefore reliable. Because of this alleged reliability, the latter claim (X) - attributing the need for secure guidance and meaning to mankind - can function as a foundation for ensuring the reliability of derived claims (such as Y). Most philosophers of education are reticent about how certain a foundation should be in order to deserve this status. They believe that no basic foundation (X) can be considered irrefutable, as a second example can illustrate. Snik argues that if one accepts autonomy-based values as a basic principle for evaluating state interference in education (X'), it can function as a foundation for justifying derived claims such as the claim that any school should respect the child's right to develop into an autonomous human being (Y') (Snik, 1999). Like De Ruyter, Snik relates the validity of conclusion Y' to a more fundamental principle (X'). In contrast with De Ruyter, however, Snik explicitly puts the epistemological status of his foundation (X') into perspective - that is, he presents the

acceptability of his conclusion as conditional, dependent on the acceptance of his basic principle.

Still, the model of justification is the same in both examples. According to this model, justification of (educational) claims hinges on (the acceptance of) more certain propositions. In addition, this model implies the acceptance of specific rules with respect to 'correct' procedures for reducing claims to foundations in order to justify them. In other words, according to this model, justification depends on accepted foundations as well as accepted (usually called 'rational') forms of argumentation.

Owing to recent developments in epistemology, both characteristics of this justification model are presently under attack (Dancy, 1985; Rorty, 1979). This may lead to changes in methodology that, as mentioned previously, could influence ideas about the main tasks and relevance of philosophy of education. Against this background, I decided to investigate how philosophers of education responded to epistemological discussions of this model of justification and how their views about the model affected their positions regarding the tasks and practical contributions of philosophy of education. To this end, I evaluated publications from the field of philosophy of education that both explicitly reject this model of justification and that suggest an alternative approach. I reviewed a range of materials, including books, book chapters, and journal articles published since 1995, when the subject started to receive substantial attention in philosophy of education.

In the next section, I will explain the disputed model of justification in more detail. Then I will present the results of my textual analyses, arranged according to the following research questions: What epistemological objections against the justification model do these philosophers emphasize most when they reject it? What loss of relevance for philosophy of education do they notice as a consequence of this rejection? What alternative views regarding justification do these authors suggest? How do specific alternative approaches affect the relevance of philosophy of education according to these authors? Generally speaking, the results of my analysis show that these philosophers of education are inclined to replace foundationalist views of justification with contextualist alternatives. In a concluding section, I will discuss whether such alternatives are tenable in the light of some critical objections.

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3 In our survey of the literature, we included articles from the following journals in the field: Educational Theory; Educational Philosophy and Theory; Journal of Philosophy of Education; and Studies in Philosophy and Education.
2. Foundationalism
The term 'foundationalism' refers to a model of justification in which a claim's acceptability is considered to depend on whether it is possible to rationally reduce it to a more certain claim (or claims) that then functions as a compelling argument (or arguments) in support of the original claim. In principle, from a foundationalist point of view assertions can be divided into two groups. The first group includes those assertions that are justified only by other assertions. The second group includes assertions that are considered justified independent of other assertions, and in that regard this second group enjoys a certain epistemological superiority. By virtue of this status, they can serve as basic foundational grounds for the justification of other assertions. Assertions from the first group can only serve as grounds for justification insofar as they can be justified in their turn, and so on, until one arrives at an assertion from the second group, which is considered independently justified. Thus, the foundationalist model of justification arranges assertions in a hierarchical structure, and this structure implies that foundations, or 'last grounds', constitute the end of the sequence. In 'classical' foundationalism these foundations are considered self-justificatory because of their special epistemological characteristics (Dancy, 1985, p. 53-4). Rorty discusses three varieties of classical foundationalism - empiricism, rationalism, and transcendentalism - each characterized by its specific brand of epistemological privilege (Rorty, 1979).

Since the Vienna Circle, the idea of self-justificatory foundations has been called into question, and most philosophers today reject such a notion. However, there still is substantial support for another kind of foundationalism, in which the hierarchical structure of justification is preserved but foundations are no longer considered infallible. Dancy refers to this as 'weak foundationalism' (Dancy, 1985, p. 62). In 'weak' foundationalist approaches justification consists of reducing claims to 'final grounds' that are not considered infallible but that are still endowed with relative epistemological privilege. They are treated as if they were more certain - and thus less in need of justification - than other claims. In this sense a "special - though not absolute - relation to truth" is still attributed to 'foundations', and it is on this basis that they can be used to justify other claims (Heyting, 2001, p. 110). A good example of this hierarchical, weak foundationalist model of justification is Snik's justification of education system's duty to respect the child's right to develop into an autonomous human being (Snik, 1999). He does not consider the claims of an autonomy-based perspective on liberal morality, which serve as foundations for his argument, self-justifying. He notes that his conclusions will only be valid for those who endorse these values. However,
by being endorsed, these values seem to gain a relative epistemological privilege that makes them suitable for the justification of other claims.

Foundationalism not only implies a specific justificatory structure; it also implies the necessity to acknowledge specific rules of inference. Only claims that were 'correctly' reduced to foundations can be accepted as justified. Mere association, for example, is not enough. Usually, established rules of 'rational' argumentation must have been applied for a justification to be considered convincing. In such cases, the involved principles of rationality gain an epistemological status that is comparable to that of (classical or weak) foundations. For example, in Habermas's theory, any concluding consensus that is reached according to the 'right' principles of discourse can be considered justified. These procedure-oriented varieties of the foundationalist model can be viewed as either 'classical' or 'weak'. In the philosophy of language, which strongly influenced British philosophy of education (see, for example, the work of Peters, Dearden, and Hirst), we can distinguish similar positions with respect to justification. Originally, linguistic philosophers such as Russell, Wittgenstein (in his Tractatus), and Moore were convinced that language analysis could yield knowledge about the structure of reality, because in their view the possibility of linguistically stating a certain fact required that language have something in common with the ontological structure of that fact. Consequently, they expected to find reliable foundations by developing a logically pure language that would make an undistorted representation of reality possible and thus would prevent complicated philosophical problems from arising (cf. Copi, 1967; Smeyers, 2001).

After World War II most philosophers (including the later Wittgenstein) rejected this kind of classical foundationalism, and weaker forms of foundationalism started to emerge in linguistic philosophy. Philosophers abandoned the pursuit of a language that would enable a perfect representation of reality, increasingly stressing the conventional nature of any language (Wittgenstein, 2001). Consequently, analytic philosophers now concentrate on describing rules for the correct use of concepts within conventional language games. The conceptual clarification this kind of linguistic analysis promises is not accurate representation of external reality, but only correct usage, as compared to the specific language game in question (White & White, 2001). This approach can be seen as a form of weak foundationalism because the rules for the 'correct use' of concepts are derived from the actual language to which these concepts belong, which gives them only relative certainty.

3. Problems of foundationalism
In the publications I analyzed, authors reject the foundationalist justi-
fication model for a number of different reasons. I distinguish two categories of reasons that correspond with the previously mentioned characteristics of foundationalism: attribution of (relative) epistemological privilege (1) to basic foundations and (2) to specific rules for correct argumentation. I then describe what kinds of critique I found with respect to both elements of foundationalism.

3.1 The problem of establishing epistemologically privileged assertions

A number of publications emphasize the problem of how to establish epistemological privilege (Biesta, 2001; Giroux, 1997, pp. 147-163 & pp. 183-233; Greene, 1995; Heyting, 2001; Peters, 1995; Peters & Lankshear, 1996). For example, Heyting argues that "neither particulars [observations] nor universals [methods, theories] can be attributed - relative - epistemological privilege" (2001, p. 110). Because any attempt to demonstrate such privilege would inevitably result in infinite regression, leaving us unable to prove any possible 'last' foundation less arbitrary than another. Maxine Greene stresses, "once we give priority to the signifier and realize that words refer and relate to other words, not to some objective world beyond, meanings proliferate and become richer. Hierarchies of meaning, hierarchies in general, become more and more absurd" (1995, p. 10).

Many authors do not confine themselves to substantiating the disputable character of attempts to prove epistemological privilege. They also draw attention to the problem of aiming for knowledge from a so-called 'view from nowhere', an ideal supported by classical as well as weak foundationalists. These critics point out that the validity of assertions is inescapably influenced by the personal and social context, and contrary to foundationalist approaches, they reject the foundationalist approach of trying to avoid this problem by means of foundations that are presumed to be (relatively) certain independent of any context. In their view, foundations inevitably represent specific partial perspectives, causing all related knowledge to be partial as well. As Child, Williams, and Birch put it, "if perspectival, then partial. And if partial then not possibly universal, ultimate, or certain" (1995, p. 167). These authors primarily draw attention to the idea that knowledge is always embedded in variable human contexts.

A third group of authors emphasizes this embedded nature of knowledge, specifically characterizing it as a kind of social embedding that especially represents (Biesta, 1998; Blake et al, 2000; Child et al, 1995; Fitzsimons & Smith, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Thompson & Gitlin, 1995; Greene, 1995; Gur'ze-ev, 1998; McLaren & Giroux, 1997; Usher et al, 1997). They often refer to Foucault's notion of 'power/knowledge',
indicating that any knowledge claim will inevitably imply power. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997), for example, point to Foucault's 'regimes of truth', discourses in which establishing knowledge and exerting power go hand in hand. Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish explicitly confront traditional hopes that knowledge rests on objective and solid foundations, which would make it not only neutral with respect to power, but also suitable to resist it: "If foundations of knowledge provide the basis on which one might 'speak the truth to power', then the search for them is of paramount importance....Yet the search has failed, on every front: in the theory of meaning, the theory of truth, the theory of knowledge and in philosophy of mind. This might be taken to mean that one cannot speak the truth to power. But on the other hand, it might rather mean not that one cannot do so, but that securing foundations is the wrong preparation for doing so" (1998). In this example, antifoundationalism is directly related to the relevance of philosophy of education, a topic I will address in detail later in this paper.

3.2 The problem of establishing epistemologically privileged procedures
The second aspect of foundationalism concerns the procedures for justifying claims. The texts I reviewed attack this dimension in three ways as well: authors criticize the conceptions of rationality, the notions of correct language use, and the characteristics of the human faculty of cognition that are implicit in these procedures for justifying claims.

Many philosophers argue that there is no such thing as the correct (or even the best possible) standard of rationality. They emphasize the limitations on validity for each procedure of justification (Biesta, 2001; Kohli, 1998; Masschelein, 1998; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Peters & Marshall, 1999; Ruhloff, 2001; Säfström, 1999; Weinstein, 1995). Reacting to Harvey Siegel's transcendental justification of rationality standards (Siegel, 1987), Weinstein asserts, "All practices, including the philosophical practices that seek to develop general and a priori theories of rationality, are thus essentially limited by particular assumptions, limited points of view, and characteristic procedures of inquiry" (1995, p. 380). Weinstein attempts to demonstrate that Siegel's transcendental argument in favor of the a priori nature of rationality principles already presupposes certain criteria for correct reasoning, such as the meaning and function of 'necessary' and 'sufficient' conditions. According to Weinstein, Siegel's approach is tantamount to withdrawing these criteria from critical scrutiny.

The second critique against privileging certain procedures of justification relates to the use of language. Some authors emphasize that conceiving of language as an unambiguous, representative structure - a
conception that is supposed to underlie foundationalist approaches - is untenable (Kohli, 1998; Marshall, 1995; and 1996). This line of argument seems most directly to undermine classical versions of linguistic philosophy that presuppose a representative view of language. Other critics primarily challenge conventionalist—that is, weak foundationalist—versions of linguistic philosophy. For instance, Michael Peters and James Marshall argue that even within language games, one will never be able to define clearly and completely the rules for the 'correct' use of concepts. They emphasize the dynamic and creative nature of language use, which cannot be understood as merely following rules. Insofar as we can speak of 'rules' in the use of language, they are constantly in the making and at best can be reconstructed in retrospect. Furthermore, we cannot attribute any normative meaning to the results of such a reconstruction.

The third reason for rejecting procedural privilege concerns presupposed features of the knowing human subject that are often used as last foundations for justifying justification procedures. This third form of critique can be found in Peters and Marshall as well. They endorse Jean-Francois Lyotard's attack on 'the concept of universal reason and of the unity of both language and the subject', in which all three varieties of critique of procedural privilege are involved and mutually connected. According to Peters and Marshall, rationality standards, language use, or the knowing subject are interrelated because the knowing subject is seen as the bearer of both language and rationality. They point out that rejecting the foundational nature of language implies that one also must abandon any idea of 'the' human subject, because every human being at any moment finds him- or herself at a crossroads of many different language games. Peters and Marshall further note that human beings actively contribute to the development of these language games (1999, p. 126).

Some authors attack conceptions of the knowing subject as a basis for procedural privilege from a different perspective. They concentrate on the presupposed portrayal of humankind in foundationalist approaches. Denise Egea-Kuehne (1995), for example, criticizes the assumption that the 'conscious self' is at the center of all human activity. Child, Williams, and Birch (1995) also reject the 'first-person perspective' assumed in the traditional model of justification, arguing that justification should not be based on ontology of the knowing human individual. They see an intrinsic connection between ethics and justification, much like the previously mentioned group of philosophers intrinsically relate knowledge and power. Following Levinas, these authors underline the primarily ethical nature of justification, as in these assertions: "the ethical relation renders ontology meaningful, not the other way around" (Child et al, 1995, p.
183); and "In this conception [of knowledge] it is not truth claims but ethical claims that edify and open up possibilities of new actions and judgment (Masschelein, 1998, p. 611; see also Masschelein, 1998; and Säfström, 1999).

4. The question of relevance in an antifoundationalist philosophy of education

Obviously, those philosophers of education who reject the foundationalist model of justification no longer see philosophy of education's primary task as contributing to the formulation and justification of education's founding principles. This turning away from foundationalism seems particularly to affect the normative role of philosophy of education. For example, according to Henry Giroux, philosophy of education has lost "the possibility to speak for all of mankind" (1997, p. 151). Accordingly, a well-established conception of philosophy of education and its contribution to educational practice seems to have come under threat. This section describes how the philosophers of education I evaluated perceive the loss of relevance that is involved with antifoundationalism.

At the most general level, this loss of relevance derives from losing those instruments that can be used to justify any kind of prescriptive pretension - that is, once one rejects epistemologically privileged foundations and procedures, it is no longer possible to justify claims in such a way that any 'rational' being must accept them. Consequently, philosophy of education seems to end up in a situation in which it no longer holds the status of a "master discipline" (Peters & Lankshear, 1996, p. 3). Many philosophers point to the general loss of prescriptive potential that results from rejecting all forms of epistemological privilege (Blake et al 1998; and 2001; Fitzsimons & Smith, 2000; Greene, 1995; Hogan, 1998; Masschelein, 1998; Prior McCarthy, 1995; Säfström, 1999; Simpson, 2000).

Other authors provide more specific reasons for philosophy of education's loss of relevance. Some of them emphasize the loss of critical potential in particular (Biesta, 2001; Gur-Ze'ev, 1998; Lather, 1998; Masschelein, 1998; and 2000; Prior McCarthy, 1995; Weinstein, 1995). Biesta, for example, argues that the philosophy of education can no longer fulfill its critical task because the lack of foundations robs us of the fixed criteria evaluative argumentation seems to require (2001, p. 136). Heyting also relates the problem of determining criteria for "finally settling an issue" to the problem of finding epistemologically privileged foundations, concluding that it hardly seems possible to formulate compelling criteria for critique (2001, p. 110). Even alternative solutions, such as making use of utopias for founding critique, seem unworkable, because these
alternatives are considered as liable to power-knowledge or ethics-knowledge connections as any other kind of criteria (cf. Gur-Ze'ev, 1998; Masschelein, 1998).

Some authors are even more specific, interpreting the general loss of prescriptive and critical potential primarily in terms of social justice. Here again, the interrelatedness of epistemological and social-philosophical approaches appears to be important - emphasis on this point is a dominant characteristic of the texts I analyzed. As in the previously cited argument by Blake et al., for example, Biesta (1998) in particular observes a loss of potential to challenge power positions. Because he considers knowledge intrinsically related to power, he concludes, "Knowledge can no longer be used to combat power. “It...signifies the end of the 'innocence' of knowledge as a critical instrument” (ibid., p. 506). Kohli also interprets the loss of relevance from a perspective of social justice, but she understands social justice in terms of emancipation (Kohli, 1998). In her view, rationality can no longer guarantee a trouble-free critical procedure because it has lost its independent character. Weinstein approaches social justice in terms of a knowledge-perspective that takes diversity into consideration and that is committed to preventing exclusion. He shares Kohli's conclusion that rationality - robbed of its alleged independence - is not the right instrument for realizing this goal (Weinstein, 1995).

5. Contextual justification
The vast majority of the philosophers of education evaluated here highlight the social or personal embedding of knowledge and justification - a point that is important to understanding their general view of justification. In fact, the alternative views of justification that these authors recommend as appropriate replacements for the foundationalist model share the following characteristic: they emphasize the interrelatedness of justifying knowledge claims and the contexts in which this process takes place. The texts I analyzed repeatedly present justification as a context-dependent process. In their alternative conceptions, these authors still treat justification as a process of giving reasons; however, they reject the hierarchical foundationalist model of justification that presupposes 'last' grounds and procedures that support all other grounds and procedures. Rather, they maintain that the validity of reasons, and of the processes in which giving reason takes shape, will vary based on the context. These alternative conceptions of justification all do without a firm

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4 See also Blake et al (1998); they suggest that we may find ways of using knowledge to combat power, but not by securing foundations.
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ground beyond all contexts—that is, a transcending meta-context. In this section, I will focus on the kinds of contexts these antifoundationalists take to be relevant and in what way. After that, I will look more closely at the 'contextualist model of justification' that emerges from these texts.

5.1 Context as meaning-context

One group of scholars appears to conceive of context as a contingent system of interrelated signs, on which any meaning is considered dependent. The context-dependency of justification naturally follows from this line of argument. These authors frequently refer to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, specifically his notion of 'difference' (Biesta, 1998; and, 2001; Egea-Kuehne, 1995; Greene, 1995; Lather, 1998; Parker, 1997). On this view, meaning is not based in external reality; rather, the process of drawing distinctions or differences is the decisive factor in attaching meaning to objects or events (cf. Biesta, 2001). Consequently, the concept of 'justification' itself can only be understood as the result of a contingent distinction. Peters and Marshall (1999) suggest a similar approach (see also Peters, 1995). Following Lyotard's radical interpretation of Wittgenstein's later work, and with special emphasis on Lyotard's notion of 'le différend', they situate contexts of meaning in language games. 'Le différend' refers to the heterogeneity of the 'discursive universe', which cannot be resolved due to the lack of transcendent arguments or rules (Caroll, 1998). By making meaning dependent on coincidental and unstable meaning-contexts, Peters and Marshall emphasize the contingency of meaning and, as a consequence, restrict the validity of justification to a specific linguistic context.

5.2 Context as personal context

The second way of contextualizing justification conceives of it as a process deeply embedded in personal viewpoints. In this approach, the reasons that can be used to justify assertions should be understood as related to the personal point of view of the speaker. I found three versions of this perspective. The first one - attributable to the philosophy of Levinas - emphasizes the personal 'knowledge-horizon' (Child et al, 1995; Masschelein, 1998; and 2000; Säfström, 1999). In this perspective, the 'totality of things' (including justifying reasons) can only take shape within the horizon of a knowing person. Stated differently, this personal horizon constitutes the context for establishing justification, and, as Säfström argues, "It follows from this that speech about the other - the unfamiliar, conceptualized in a language which emanates from the knower in the center of the world-by necessity is caught up in a reduction of the
other to the same" (1999, p. 227). Consequently, the significance of justification is considered restricted to a personal horizon.

In a second version, personal commitment, rather than the personal knowledge-horizon, is considered to be the relevant context for understanding justification. As a consequence, every justification is politically charged and in that sense restricted (Fitzsimons & Smith, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Peters & Lankshear, 1996; Prior McCarthy, 1995; Stone, 1995; Weinstein, 1995). In a fairly radical statement of this position, McLaren and Giroux maintain that "every time we use language, we engage in a highly partisan sociopolitical act...because each time we use it, we embody how cultural processes have been written on us and how we in turn write and produce our own scripts for naming and negotiating reality" (1997, p. 23). The third perspective that relates justification to personal context is sometimes called 'feminist'. Philosophers who adopt this stance relate justification to the personal corporality, rather than to a personal horizon or commitment. They consider processes of knowing and justification to be embedded in the 'lived body', which has its own historical and social setting. Prior McCarthy expresses this viewpoint in asserting that all knowledge is eventually 'constituted' in what she calls "features of our bodily selves" Prior McCarthy, 1995, p. 35). In a similar context, Kohli speaks of the "embodied selves" (1998, p. 519). According to this view, our corporal embedding restricts the significance of justification.

5.3 Context as discourse-context
The third and last type of context to which the antifoundationalists I considered relate justification consists in a social and communicative embedding (Blake et al, 1998; Heyting, 2001; Ruhloff, 2001; Simpson, 2000). According to this view, reasons and their relevance are related to the communicative discourse-context. Blake et al. define discourse as "a collection of statements [involving knowledge or validity claims] generated at a variety of times and places...and which hangs together according to certain principles as a unitary collection of statements" (1998, p. 14). According to this definition, the validity of grounds of justification is related to - and restricted by - the discourse in which they are (or can be) employed; consequently, any actual justification presupposes a specific discourse in which this justification can be considered convincing (cf. Heyting, 2001). As opposed to the foundationalist model of justification, the authors who take this view do not conceive of a coordinating discourse-context that transcends the limitations of separate contexts with respect to justification.

To sum up, a theme that unifies the antifoundationalist materials I
reviewed is their emphasis on the restricted validity of any justification. The way in which they relate justification to (different types of) context distinguishes this approach from (weak) foundationalism, on the one hand, and relativism, on the other. Although weak foundationalism does not require absolute certainty for basic foundations in the justificatory hierarchy, it holds on to the idea of relatively undisputed basic convictions that can serve justificatory ends irrespective of contextual factors. On this view, justification depends exclusively on content (compare with Williams, 2001, p. 164 ff.). By contrast, my sample of antifoundationalist philosophers rejects this idea of convictions endorsed independent of context and put into action whenever needed. As we have seen, these authors consider the validity of all ideas to be 'embedded', or contextualized. Accordingly, justification – in terms of content as well as procedure – depends on contextually varying sets of assumptions that can be called into question in any other context.

This radical contextualist approach does not necessarily make these authors relativists either, however, because they do not think the context (whether semantical, personal, or discursive) makes things true. According to these critics of foundationalism, justification is not passively subject to a preceding context that determines what propositions are to be considered 'privileged'. Although relativism relates epistemological privilege to a context, it continues to rely on the foundationalist model of justification, in which justification consists in hierarchically reducing claims to (now context-dependent) privileged basic convictions. Antifoundationalists also consider justification a process of reducing claims to undisputed ones, but unlike relativists, they do not consider the undisputed claims to be (part of) frameworks that are themselves beyond justification. Rather, they consider such claims to be ones that are momentarily taken for granted, but that can be brought up for discussion at any time (cf. Williams, 2001, pp. 226ff.). The preceding quote from McLaren and Giroux illustrates this point clearly by stressing that using language not only expresses the embodiment of cultural processes, but at the same time implies writing and producing our own scripts. Here, justification is de-

5 I borrow the term 'radical contextualist' from Williams (2001). For a basic definition of relativism, see Putnam's Renewing philosophy: "Truth in a language - any language - is determined by what the majority of the speakers of that language would say" (1992, P. 67). In his Problems of knowledge, Williams adds other possible frames to this definition by speaking of "relativism, which says that things are only 'true for' a particular person or 'culture' (2001, p. 10).
picted as active engagement in a specific context, thus indicating that
being embedded does not imply being determined.

This contextualist approach affects the meaning and significance
of 'justification' in a fundamental way: it stresses the local nature and
relevance of any justification, thus robbing it of its traditional status and
importance but not of its local relevance. This view emphasizes the
aporetic nature of justification - that is, being justified no longer implies
an unqualified recommendation but, rather, draws attention to the
restricted nature of any recommendation. This point becomes clear when
we examine what these authors think about the practical relevance of an
antifoundationalist philosophy of education.

6. Benefits for the relevance of the philosophy of education
Although the antifoundationalist critics I evaluated for this study pay
much attention to the relevance of philosophy of education, they do not
seem to consider justification a decisive factor in the contribution to
educational practice. These authors do not approach the question of phi-
losophy of education's relevance from the perspective of epistemological
considerations; instead, they reason primarily from social-philosophical
considerations. As noted in the preceding discussion, these authors
observed that rejecting the foundationalist model of justification results in
a loss of prescriptive and critical potential; however, they do not appear to
regret this 'loss'. Instead of trying to compensate for the limited scope of
justification, antifoundationalists intend to turn this limitation into an
advantage. They do not envisage another form of universalism or general
validity, but instead take the lack of these options as their point of
departure. The views I observed regarding the benefits of antifoun-
dationalist approaches in philosophy of education appear to be related to
the three justification contexts I distinguished in the previous section.
According to these authors, philosophy of education's relevance results
from making the restrictions that are inherent in each of those conceptions
of context productive in a social-political sense.

6.1 Drawing attention to alternative meanings
Those antifoundationalists who consider justification in the light of
contingent contexts of meaning emphasize the inevitable 'blind spot' of
every context. In their view relevance should consist in preventing
possible alternative meanings from being excluded as a consequence of
such blind spots. Given that each meaning-context favors a restricted
range of meanings, it hides all possible alternative meanings from view.
Since these authors do not allow for compelling criteria for choosing the
'best' (or even a 'better') meaning-context in any situation, choosing a
context becomes a paramount responsibility. Antifoundationalists who associate themselves with concepts such as Derrida's 'deconstruction' (Biesta, 1998; and 2001; Egea-Kuehne, 1995; Greene, 1995; Lather, 1998; Parker, 1997), or Lyotard's 'legitimacy by paralogy' (Peters, 1995), share this approach. They contend that philosophy is in no position to take over this responsibility for choosing a meaning-context from educators. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev calls this philosophical inability to decisively make - and thus prescribe - such choices "philosophical negativism" (1998, p. 463). Instead of trying to release educators from the responsibility of having to choose the 'right' meaning-context, these authors reason the other way around, defining philosophy of education's relevance as its ability to enhance the awareness of this responsibility by pointing out the limited nature of any context and the resulting problem of choice. As a consequence, relevance is not primarily related to taking unequivocal positions, but rather to 'indecisiveness'.

A similar reaction can be observed with respect to the previously mentioned loss of critical potential. Awareness that alternative positions might be excluded is given priority over advocating a particular view. As a consequence, any position one might take is put into perspective from the very beginning. After all, every meaning is susceptible to deconstruction (as only one side of the 'difference') and thus contingent (cf. Masschelein, 1998, p. 524). The prior relevance of philosophy of education consists in bringing to the surface any meanings one inclines to take for granted (cf. Biesta, 2001; Greene, 1995; Gur-ze'ev, 1998; Parker, 1997) - a process that creates space for diversity, for the 'other' (cf. Biesta, 1998; Blake et al, 2001; Peters, 1995; Peters & Marshall, 1999).

6.2 Attention for the other person
Philosophers who relate justification to personal context represent a second perspective on the relevance of an antifoundationalist philosophy of education. They are also intent on resisting exclusion, not primarily in terms of 'meaning' but rather in a social-political sense. On this view, the concept of 'exclusion' is related to personal ways of life that are in danger of being excluded if specific contexts of justification are made too absolute and the relevance of personal contexts is neglected. I found two versions of this approach: the first is typical of authors who emphasize Levinas's concept of a 'personal horizon', and the second is characteristic of those who interpret the personal context in terms of 'embodied subjects' (that is, the feminist group) or personal commitment. I will begin by discussing this second approach.

Assuming that societies tend to force specific - and thus exclusionary - points of view upon their participants, this group points out
that preventing exclusion demands heightened awareness and continuous effort. Philosophy of education can contribute to preventing exclusion by criticizing those social structures that shape and constrain persons. The idea is not to develop a positive blueprint of society - after all, every model is necessarily 'exclusionary'. In fact, thinking about a 'just' society from this perspective can only be done in negative terms (that is, in terms of what one must avoid). Gur-Ze'ev's term "philosophical negativism" can also be employed in this respect. According to McLaren and Giroux, philosophy of education should be able to denounce social issues in the light of a 'better' (though unrealizable) future: "[T]he purpose of developing a critical language of schooling is not to describe the world more objectively, but to create a more ethically empowering world which encourages a greater awareness of the way in which power can be mobilized for the purposes of human liberation" (1997, p. 21).

Although all of the authors in my sample consider context essential to procedures of justification, this contextual constraint elicits criticism - in order to avoid exclusion - rather than acceptance. Unlike relativists, antifoundationalists do not treat context as an inviolable constraint. Instead, they seize on this constraint as an incitement to seek out the boundaries of context and, if possible, to shift them. Against this background, Padraig Hogan points out the importance of dialogue: "It is crucial to realize that we need not just be prisoners, or helpless victims, of ... partiality" (1998, p. 370). Other authors attach a similar function to counternarratives (stories from marginalized points of view), which can contribute to overcoming the limitations of a particular context (Giroux, 1997; Peters & Lankshear, 1996). This approach sees philosophy of education as relevant primarily through its capacity to draw attention to these possibilities by finding and exploring examples of such counternarratives.

To this point, I have observed antifoundationalists' strong inclination to shift priority from epistemological questions toward social-philosophical ones. This tendency seems even more pronounced in those who, following Levinas, define personal context as 'personal horizon'. Instead of the traditional objectifying conception of knowledge (in which we 'appropriate' the world as it is), these authors emphasize the constitutive and restrictive role of the personal horizon. In order to overcome the detrimental consequences of this restriction, they advocate a conception of knowledge as originating from "the ethical relation between self and other [person]" (Child et al., 1995, p. 183). According to them, one should let go of the restrictions that spring from such concepts as 'autonomy' and 'autonomous knowledge' and surrender to the heteronomy of the encounter with the other person. These authors argue in favor of openness to what 'exists' outside the personal horizon and remains unimaginable from any
'autonomous' position. Their ideas regarding how to escape the limitations of a personal perspective highlight the extent to which ethical or social-philosophical considerations have supplanted epistemological ones. They assert that such an escape is not effected by exchanging ideas or confronting meanings, but rather through the direct encounter with another human being. In the ethical experience central to such encounters, one is approached as an individual. This leaves the individual an individual-in-relation instead of a (potentially) autonomous one. In that capacity, the individual cannot escape from responsibility, from the "demand to judge and act upon the system in one's own name.... [H]uman beings are called upon as individuals, and only as individuals, to resist hegemony" (Masschelein, 1998. p. 529). In this approach, the relevance of philosophy of education consists in resisting the hegemony of the personal horizon. When persons open themselves to the 'other' in an existential sense, they will be able to avoid having their judgments determined by their preliminary personal position.

6.3 Continuing the conversation: questioning the boundaries of discourse-contexts
Finally, I turn to the relevance of a philosophy of education that interprets the context of justification as a discourse-context. Like those authors who see justification in terms of personal context, these critics also emphasize restrictive and hence exclusionary influences exerted by specific justification contexts (in this case, discourse-contexts); they expect to benefit by making people aware of these restrictions without intending to formulate a normative framework for standards of justification. Assuming that one is not necessarily imprisoned within the boundaries of actual discourse, these authors see philosophy of education's primary task as making explicit and calling into question those conventions that people are inclined to take for granted and that result in exclusionary practices. This makes it possible to challenge the constraints of discourse-contexts, push them and shift them. In this way, separate discourses can mutually enrich one another. Because this group of antifoundationalists does not pursue a fixed objective, the image that results is that of a philosophy of education that actively contributes to "continuing the conversation" about educational issues (Rorty, 1979).

7. A new normativity in philosophy of education
In analyzing the results of my inquiry, I observed that the contextual nature of justification became the 'leitmotiv'. The antifoundationalist approaches to philosophy of education I found in my sample appear to share the intention to avoid any claim to universal validity, not only for
epistemological reasons, but also - perhaps even primarily - because of the exclusions that result from such claims. This raises two questions: First, is it possible to avoid any appeal to universality? And, second, even if we determine that it is possible to avoid such an appeal, how should we judge the relevance of this kind of philosophy of education?

I will address the first question with reference to two critical arguments made by Siegel. He maintains, first, that it is not possible to avoid universal claims with respect to basic points of departure and, second, that it is not possible to avoid universal claims with respect to procedures of justification.

Child, Williams, and Birch provide a fairly representative characterization of how authors in my sample reject universal claims: "Claims of unity, certainty, and universality...are always taken up and protected by situated, embodied persons. They are thus...not possibly universal, ultimate, or certain" (Child et al. 1995, p. 167). According to Siegel, however, "in denying the universal one embraces it; one cannot escape the universal by denying it" - that is, denying universality is self-contradictory because it inevitably implies such a claim (1996, p. 174). The preceding quotation seems to confirm this, if only by using such terms as 'always' and 'not possible'. It is valid to ask whether such an argument necessarily makes my authors (weak) foundationalists after all.

Before answering this question, however, it is important to remember the primary characteristics of foundationalism as explained at the outset of this paper: a conception of knowledge as hierarchically structured that rests on a basis of relatively certain claims and/or is derived according to relatively privileged procedures. Thus understood, I doubt whether the arguments put forth in my sample can ultimately be reduced to building alternative hierarchies with the same characteristics. To start with, neither the shared repudiation of universal claims, nor the shared intention to avoid exclusion, functions as an undisputed ground for justifying other claims. These so-called 'propositional attitudes' do not owe their status to any epistemological features. In fact, the philosophers of education I studied point out that an important reason for resisting the primacy of epistemology concerns its practical consequences. As they see it, weak foundationalism is no option for resolving the problems that result from lacking absolute certainty (the traditional prerequisite for any foundationalist approach), because in the end such a solution amounts to uncontrolled acceptance of social exclusion. Instead of clinging to the primacy of epistemology by reformulating it (the approach characteristic of weak foundationalism), these authors develop epistemological views that deny the primacy of epistemology, putting a basic commitment - that is, to the different varieties of inclusion I described previously - in its
place. Compared to that commitment, justification is only of minor importance.

Given this degradation of epistemology in their conception of knowledge, antifoundationalist philosophers emphasize the local, contextual basis of any justification's acceptability. As a consequence, they do not judge or evaluate positions as such, but always as related to a context and with a view to their practical impact. Because assertions 'as such' lack any epistemological status, they contend, the process of justification cannot be performed if the context and the preliminary commitments related to this context are ignored. To return to Siegel, he contests this contextual restriction of validity claims, arguing that mathematics, for example, remains valid irrespective of whether its claims are accepted in a specific situation (ibid., p. 176). Siegel seems to consider relativism the only alternative for foundationalism; however, the antifoundationalists I studied seem to view justification less as a matter of 'all or nothing' than foundationalist models assume. According to this view, denying universalism does not necessarily mean particularism, and denying objectivity does not necessarily imply subjectivism or social relativism. Rather, emphasizing the embedded nature of knowledge draws attention to the interactive dimensions of justification (see Burbules, 1995). To sum up, it may be said that the authors in my sample appeal to claims with a general import, but that does not make them (weak) foundationalists. In addition, their use of rational procedures (while denying their universal validity) does not make them foundationalists either.

Although Siegel considers any appeal to rational procedures while denying their universal validity self-contradictory, such a verdict ignores the different meaning antifoundationalist philosophers attach to justificatory procedures (see Siegel, 1996, p. 180; and 1998, p. 30). In the first place, their validity is considered contextual in nature - as a consequence, philosophical or scientific justification does not necessarily imply practical justification. In the second place, in part because of their rejection of the primacy of epistemology, justification by means of rational procedures is considered of less importance. Kohli observes, for example, that our rationalist Cartesian tradition is tantamount to excluding "the emotional, the sensuous, the imaginative" (1998, p. 516).

Although it seems possible to avoid universal claims, and my authors cannot be labeled (weak) foundationalists, there remains the question of whether a philosophy of education that considers grounds only of the local, and justification only of limited importance, retains any relevance. Although the antifoundationalists' primary aim is to avoid exclusion, their approach does not allow for generalizing this aim either. On closer inspection, such generalization is not what they intend. Rather
than plead in favor of a specific position, they want to create openness to a plurality of possible positions. However, this intention does not negate the fact that their position radiates a strongly normative appeal, that favors pluralism. In the absence of epistemologically justified foundations and procedures, the philosopher of education is ultimately thrown back on his or her commitment, which cannot be founded but which still emanates normativity. In conclusion, the characteristics of this normativity deserve closer examination.

In a way, the personally or discursively embedded commitment emphasized in the texts I analyzed is reminiscent of the normative approach dominant in traditional continental philosophy of education. This tradition, which prevailed through the 1950s, aimed at developing educational doctrines based on religious or political principles that were not considered subject to further justification, but instead were a matter of existential creed (cf. Stellwag, 1962). However, unlike this traditional normative philosophy of education, the kind of commitment emphasized by the antifoundationalist philosophers I studied does not serve the development of any doctrines, let alone prescriptive ones. For example, Lather writes that she aims not for approaches that will enable us to settle any educational dilemmas, but for approaches "that call out a promise of practice on a shifting ground" (1998, p. 497).

The antifoundationalist approach as I have reconstructed it also has similarities to a more recent kind of normativity in philosophy of education - that developed during the 1970s in a first wave of response to Habermas's critical theory. In this variety, procedures rather than first principles (whether religious or political) were of central importance. Furthermore, this trend in philosophy of education did not aim at developing any prescriptive doctrines; like contemporary critics analyzed here, critical philosophers of education of the 1970s aimed at stimulating (critical) attitudes and discourse. Unlike their contemporary counterparts, however, they did so with the intention of ensuring dominion-free consensus. Although power appears to be an important factor to a vast majority of my authors, they do not aim at defeating its influence, nor do they expect this to be possible. The publications analyzed here, then, seem to express a 'new' normativity that avoids both the formation of prescriptive doctrines and the formation of decisive procedures, as described in the following: "This in turn involves building an ethos...where differences and tensions are not only acknowledged, but also experienced in such a way that they enlarge the context of what is taught and learned, enrich an appreciation of diversity and progressively discipline the preconceptions that underlie the exercise of all judgment" (Hogan, 1998, p. 371).
What is 'new' about the emerging normativity is its orientation toward openness and undecidability. According to my authors, philosophy of education should not put itself in the position of practitioners by taking over their responsibility for making decisions and choices. In their view, philosophers of education should stimulate and revive discussions rather than try to conclude them. From this perspective, human expression and inter-human exchange seem to be valued over any well-founded conclusion.

8. References


