Facing epistemic uncertainty: characteristics, possibilities, and limitations of a discursive contextualist approach to philosophy of education
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IX
SUMMARIZING AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:
COMMITMENT AND ACADEMIC RIGOR IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

1. Introduction
The occasion for the research in this thesis was the serious discord between philosophers of education, as regards whatever could still be seen as the central task of the discipline. Although the history of the philosophy of education has appeared to be characterized by the continual questioning and redescription of this task (see chapter one), it seems that as from the late 1990s the issue is more urgent than ever. Against the background of radical doubts that have arisen in respect of the framework that was previously used to legitimize the content of the philosophy of education, hefty debates have taken place on what the discipline might still entail in the future, and even whether it still has a future anyway. Many of those debates have an epistemological background; they revolve around the question of the status that can still be attributed to (educational-philosophical) claims to knowledge. In light of those debates, the content of the philosophy of education is also discussed.

Against the background of the developments that I described, I too question the tasks of a contemporary philosophy of education, and I too take as my point of departure the epistemological doubts that have appeared to be characteristic of contemporary philosophy. In this endeavor I especially focus on the rejection of the fundamentalist knowledge model, because it is the rejection of this model by several authoritative philosophers that seems to be at the core of the radical doubts within philosophy, and it has clearly left its mark on the philosophy of education. The objective of this thesis has always been to get an idea of what - in this light - might be an acceptable epistemological position in order to subsequently examine what implications such a position has on the content of the philosophy of education, with special attention paid to the role that educational philosophical insight might be able to play in the practice of education and teaching. In this final chapter, I will formulate conclusions on these issues. I will work my way towards those conclusions by first and consecutively summarizing the previous chapters – as from chapter two.

2. Summarizing remarks
The first inquiry of this thesis (chapter two) examined how the rejection of the foundationalist model of justification by some renown philosophers has been received by authors working within the present day field of
philosophy of education. Since the practical relevance of philosophy of education - traditionally of utmost importance to the discipline - was, in the past, consistently perceived from a foundationalist perspective, I also investigated as to how the authors of the publications that were analyzed believed practical relevance to have been affected by the rejection of the foundationalist model. Subsequently, I investigated which alternative approaches to justification that these philosophers of education came to adopt, and which consequences they considered these to have for the practical relevance of the discipline.

The main objection to the foundationalist justification model as put forward by the authors examined relates to the epistemological privilege the model awards to either foundational claims or justification procedures. They consider the foremost loss to the practical relevance of philosophy of education to be that of its prescriptive capacity; a capacity wholly dependent - at least according to these authors - on such forms of epistemological privilege. The alternative approaches to justification as put forward by the authors analyzed are all evidence of what I term 'radical contextualism'. In radical contextualism, justification is considered to be a context-bound process that is local and temporary in character.

Accordingly, practical relevance was no longer sought in substantiating recommendations. To the authors examined, practical relevance primarily constituted challenging or, at the very least, revealing the processes of exclusion by calling attention to the restrictive - and thus exclusionary - character of any form of justification. This view on practical relevance, which I have termed 'new normativity', distinguishes itself from the traditional normative philosophy of education in that substantive prescriptions are abandoned and authors confine themselves to the identification of restrictions.

This confinement, however, displays a kind of normativity - and thus prescriptivism - in itself. Ultimately, the suggested approach to philosophy of education displays a - more or less implicit - commitment with 'inclusion'. In this respect, it is important to note, however, that the shared intention of these authors to counteract exclusion does not, here, constitute a new and ultimate, taken for granted, ground for justification - in other words, a new epistemological foundation - for other claims. It is better understood as an attitude; not one that derives its status from any epistemological characteristic, but rather a response to the practical consequences of awarding primary importance to flawed epistemology; namely the fostering of various forms of exclusion. To put it differently, these authors have developed views on justification in which the primacy of epistemology is replaced by a basic practical commitment.

The antifoundationalist authors are not the only philosophers who
recognise the uncertainty of knowledge claims that seem to be characteristic of contemporary epistemology. There is quite a large group of philosophers of education that also appreciates the inevitable fallibility of knowledge, but that deals with it in a different, more moderate, way. In order to go about my search for an acceptable epistemological approach in a well-considered way, it is important to also scrutinize the position of those authors. In chapter three, I show that the so-called ‘fallibilism’ in philosophy of education also rejects the ‘old’ idea of self-justified foundations as a ultimate ground for the justification of knowledge, thus sharing the idea that knowledge always comes with a certain degree of uncertainty. However, fallibilism upholds that certain beliefs may still be classified as 'more certain' than others in an epistemological sense, and in that sense may serve as justificatory grounds that may be fallible, but that can still be regarded as generally valid.

Referring to two examples of fallibilism in the philosophy of education, I show that fallibilism has two powerful characteristics. Due to its recognition of the fallibility of basic beliefs, fallibilism will continue to critically examine its basic beliefs, and adjust them where necessary. Furthermore, it enables us to forcefully defend theoretical claims, so that it can also make content-specific contributions to educational debates – something that antifoundationalist philosophy of education seems to lack. However, I furthermore argue that fallibilism also raises questions that need further answering. On the one hand, it appears that the epistemological privilege that is still being granted to justificatory grounds, in a philosophical sense cannot be properly defended when abandoning the notion of justificatory grounds that are justified in themselves. On the other hand, it appears that the notion of fallible justificatory grounds does not reconcile with the - still advocated - idea of general validity, so that the attribution of general validity might even be evidence of ethnocentrism rather than epistemological certainty.

The questions raised by fallibilism prompted me to look further for an epistemological approach that might be able to find its way around these issues. Considering the fact that the problem is located in the notion of privileged justificatory grounds - thus in the vertical structure of knowledge claims - it seems useful to examine in more detail the contextualist approach of knowledge, in which justification is considered to be embedded in a horizontal network of mutually related beliefs, as proposed by the antifoundationalist authors discussed in chapter two. Such an approach does not take the idea of general validity as its starting point and, in any case, has done away with the concept of granting epistemological privilege. However, the question is whether contextualism does not lumber us with a much greater problem, namely 'relativism'.
The fourth chapter links up with the foregoing on two points. Firstly, it starts from the epistemic uncertainty that characterizes contemporary philosophy of education and the idea of fundamental indecision that is connected with it – by, for instance, the antifoundationalist authors in chapter two. I look into the question of how, in the philosophy of education, we can deal with such indecision in a constructive, but also philosophically acceptable, way. I focus especially on irony as a characteristic instrument that has been used by philosophers in the past when faced with uncertainty or indecision. The central questions are: what may be expected from the use of irony as a philosophical instrument in relation with the indecision that we face in the philosophy of education, and which practical relevance of the philosophy of education may be connected with it? The chapter provides a further link with the previous, as it pays extensive attention to the notion of horizontally ordered justification contexts that is taken into account in Rorty’s notion of irony. As such, chapter four also renders insights that are important to my ongoing epistemological search.

In general, it becomes clear in chapter four that ‘ironic’ philosophers, among whom are Schlegel and Kierkegaard, argue that irony sooner raises questions than it provides answers. It is precisely in the questions evoked by irony, ironic authors believe, that the insights lay, which are generated through its use. On the basis of two recent approaches to irony - Bransen’s and Rorty’s -, I develop my own interpretation whereby irony generates an insight into the irreducible interplay between the informative content of a claim and the presupposed communicative context in which that claim is made. Of course we must be aware of turning irony, or doubt in general, into a ‘pseudofoundation’. This is accomplished by referring to meta-ironic reflection, which demonstrates that this approach to irony - as other approaches - can, in its turn, only be understood as informative against the background of a presupposition (as part of a presupposed context) about the way in which human meaning-making is accomplished. The analysis resulted in a tool for philosophy of education whereby claims are analyzed as amendments to communicative contexts as these are presupposed by speakers or authors.

This is illustrated by the analyses of scientific-educational debates over the issue of ‘students at risk’; the problem of groups of pupils in danger of structurally falling behind in terms of academic achievements - in Dutch also referred to as the ‘issue of educational deprivation’. Although the ‘actual’ communicative context in which an utterance was made can never be reconstructed with any certitude - and, therefore, neither the 'actual' informative content of the claim - such an analysis does provide an insight into the interplay of contextual (for instance, a
presupposed audience’s views on 'students at risk') and informative (suggestions for defining, or dealing with, 'students at risk') dimensions of claims and their acceptability.

In chapter five, I continue my exploration of contextualism as a possibly acceptable epistemological position that takes account of the inevitable uncertainty of knowledge claims. My first question is how the idea of contexts of justification can be concretized. Firstly, I concentrate on Rorty’s idea of vocabularies as justification contexts, which came to the fore in the discussion of his concept of irony in chapter four. It becomes clear that Rorty’s interpretation of communicative justification context, on the one hand, offers us useful elements, since - among other things - it shows us how the justification, evaluation, and modification of our ways of speaking can be understood, irrespective of how the world is. At the same time, however, Rorty’s discursive approach of contextual justification does not completely escape the suggestion of relativism, or arbitrariness, because he does not properly clarify how the transformation, or renewal of justification contexts may be understood.

Next, a dynamic-discursive concept of context is derived from chapter four, which enables me to explain how speakers in the communicative process are, on the one hand, bound by contexts of justification, but at the same time transform, and thus transcend, these contexts - immediately doing away with the reproach of relativism. Thinking in terms of the idea of a dynamic-discursive context, an image emerges of justification that, in principle, corresponds to the way in which we deal with justification in our day-to-day conversation, but of which I argue that it can also be used for developing a more academic-intellectually oriented epistemology. I thus arrived at a beginning of an epistemology that I call 'discursive', as the justification and development of knowledge is made fully dependent on the ongoing exchange of claims, objections, and arguments between the participants in a communicative process.

In relation to the possible consequences of such a discursive epistemology for a stance on the tasks of the philosophy of education, in chapter five I conclude that there is no longer any direct epistemological reason for any prescriptive role of the philosophy of education whatsoever – as was, and still is, argued by fallibilist philosophers of education. Then again, the plea for a philosophy of education that limits itself to clarifying contextual restrictions - as submitted by the antifoundationalist philosophers of education in chapter two - does not seem to offer a solution either: firstly, because it itself is also normative, so that, at the least, it radiates the suggestion of prescriptiveness; and, secondly, because it, therefore, does not seem to be contextualist in its actual sense. The notion of restrictions that are inevitably attached to justification, thus rather acts
as a pseudo-foundation for the plea for a specific interpretation of the philosophy of education. I believe that the proposed model, therefore, does not optimally use the possibilities offered by a contextual approach towards the philosophy of education.

Chapter six offers a further elaboration of the notion of dynamic-discursive contexts of justification, focusing primarily on the activity of the individual participant in the communication. That focus is needed to investigate whether a discursive epistemology does not inevitably imply conventionalism. This is investigated in light of the question of what it means for a subject to learn to use a language. In view of the potentially practical relevance of the philosophy of education, it is also examined whether answering this question can help us form an idea of how best to deal with 'differential academic language proficiency', which is a topic that is related to the issue of 'students at risk' that is addressed in chapter four.

I argue that the learning of a language can best be understood as an active participation in a process of practice-based communication (negotiation) about how the world is, resulting in a conceptualization of the world: a process denoted as 'world-making'. Differences in '(academic) language proficiency' should not, therefore, be construed as different levels of skill in the use of a linguistic apparatus but rather as different levels of expertise acquired through participating in this process of 'world-making'. Approached from this perspective, one may argue for awarding a more substantial role to cooperative problem-solving - which involves the (re-)construction of meaning - in dealing with 'differential language proficiency' in schools than has been done so far.

Based on the insights gained in chapter six, the notion of a discursive epistemological position is further developed in chapter seven. I make it clear as to how communicative processes may be regarded as practice-based negotiation on how the world is. In that negotiation, participants in the communication play the role of both the initiator of the transformation of the practice-based presuppositions on how the world works and the conservator of – another part of – that collection of presuppositions. This picture immediately shows that this approach does not allow for conservative conventionalism.

In such an approach, the development of knowledge appears as a critical-discursive process in which even the most fundamental presuppositions can be put up for discussion when there seems reason to do so within the communication. Then again, certain presuppositions may last a very long time when they satisfy. In such cases one may speak of a state of 'reflective equilibrium'. However, even in such a state of – relative – equilibrium the justification context is continuously evaluated, added to,
and modified, and the possibility always remains that the equilibrium may be abruptly upset whenever some of the, what we thought, most basic presuppositions are put up for discussion successfully.

In relation to the issue of the possibility of scientific progress within such an approach to knowledge, it is further submitted that such a progress can only be spoken of in light of specific criteria for progress within a specific scientific communicative practice, where those criteria themselves are also simply a part of the ongoing scientific debate and, therefore, may be put up for discussion too. Just like in all other forms of communication, contributions to the scientific discourse always entail attunement to the common presuppositions, on the one hand, but at the same time a proposal to revise some of those presuppositions, on the other hand. In line with the notion of expertise as developed in chapter six, I subsequently suggest that academic expertise then might best be understood as the ability to excel in the conducting of research according to the common criteria for academic inquiry, as well as the capability to critically, and successfully, bring up for discussion even those beliefs that were deemed to be basic.

I, therefore, argue that the epistemic criteria for what may apply as an acceptable knowledge contribution to educational-philosophical debates are not set before that debate either, but are rather a part of it – which makes them dependent on whatever the participants in the communication deem important. I subsequently submit that, in that respect, we may indeed – as tentatively suggested in chapter two - refer to a shift in the philosophy of education from a 'primacy of epistemology' to a 'primacy of commitment'. Since it has not become clear in the previous chapters as to how such an idea of a so-called ‘primacy of commitment’ might actually be properly understood, in chapter eight I examine what that idea might entail and what the consequences of such an idea might be for the philosophy of education, with that special attention is paid to its practical relevance.

Drawing on the previously gained insights concerning communicative contexts, in chapter eight I argue that the 'primacy of commitment' in philosophy of education may eventually be best understood as the notion that the development and justification of educational-philosophical knowledge can ultimately be reduced to a process wherein a proponent makes a claim and is prepared to defend that claim in front of a specific audience - as perceived or imagined by the proponent. It is precisely in the willingness of the proponent to present and defend this specific claim in front of this specific audience, where the commitment should be located.
3. Discursive epistemology

Now that the conclusions in the previous chapters have been summarized, the general questions that were formulated at the beginning of this thesis, and that were addressed in different places throughout this thesis, can be answered. This firstly concerns the issue of an epistemological approach that is able to deal with the inevitable fallibility of knowledge claims in an acceptable way. The central question is when one can speak of knowledge, a question that I have interpreted in terms of 'epistemic entitlement'. It then concerns the question when someone can be considered justified to make a certain claim - concerning how the world is. Within the discursive epistemological position that I defend here, one can speak of 'epistemic entitlement' when a claim of a speaker within specific communicative practices is accepted as valid by the audience. Such a situation will only exist if the participants in the communicative practice – the audience – believe that the speaker has sufficient reasons to make that claim. If doubts exist, the speaker will be asked to further support his claim with additional reasons. When the speaker is not able to match his communicative contribution to some minimal epistemic standards that presently apply within the communicative practice at hand, the claim will be rejected and will not become part of the communicative context. In the case that a speaker is deemed justified to make a claim – in other words, when 'epistemic entitlement' applies – the claim made will become part of the collection of presuppositions that are considered to be shared within the communicative practice and to which the participants in the communication may refer to in the further process of the communication as ‘self-evident’, at least for the time being. This ‘presumed common ground’, or the communicative context, thus forms the 'body of knowledge' as it were, which can continually be appealed to in the communicative process. In principle, each element of this ‘body of knowledge’ may be put up for discussion at any moment in the communication. However, since the communicative context is at the same time the necessary condition for the possibility to do so, not all presuppositions that are part of it can be put up for discussion at the same time without breaking off the communication altogether.

This makes it clear that, within a discursive epistemological approach, knowledge is not regarded as a relatively constant collection of propositions that are deemed to guarantee a certain certainty about how the world is, irrespective of a certain communicative practice. Knowledge is, in any case, regarded as bound by a specific communicative practice. However, the ‘body of knowledge’ is not determined by the communicative practice within which it is generated and applied either, since there are no unshakeable restrictions binding justification within communicative practices.
Communicative practices. The presupposed knowledge-base within a communicative practice is both the result and part of the ongoing communicative process of making and defending claims, within which, if necessary, additional reasons are requested and provided - whether, or not, to everyone's satisfaction. The fact that knowledge of the world is thus viewed as a provisional outcome of an ongoing communicative negotiation process reveals the social-constructivist nature of a discursive-epistemological approach to knowledge.

Such an approach to knowledge also has consequences for our understanding of academic inquiry and academic knowledge. Among other things, it makes clear that science has no exclusive, or in any way privileged, access to knowledge about the world. After all, science, or the scientific discourse is merely one possible communicative practice within which knowledge claims are generated, applied, and discussed. This conclusion, however, does not imply that no special status can be attributed to scientific knowledge claims. Science may still be regarded as an authority when a specific form of knowledge is concerned, one which can be characterized with terms such as 'validity', 'reliability', or 'verifiability', etc. - even if, or actually because – their meaning is continually renewed over time. Whether science, or scientific knowledge, is regarded an authority within a society, rests – just like in the case of (insights from) other communicative practices, such as religion or art – on whatever science yields in the eyes of the recipients, and this social appreciation may also vary historically.

Within the academic world, each discipline may be seen as a separate communicative (sub)practice, each dealing its own questions, concepts, and methods. The same goes for the philosophy of education. In that sense, within a discursive epistemology there is room for educational-philosophical knowledge claims with their own integrity and with their own – philosophical – acceptability criteria. However, insofar as specific educational-philosophical knowledge exists, it also applies that it is both an outcome and a part of a specific – educational philosophical – discourse, so that whatever may be regarded as academically acceptable educational-philosophical knowledge will always be part of an ongoing negotiation process.

4. Tasks and possibilities of philosophy of education
Now it has been clarified as to how educational-philosophical knowledge can be understood from a discursive epistemological standpoint, we can raise the question of which consequences may be attached to that position when it comes to the tasks and possibilities of philosophy of education.

In the first place, I found that there seems to be no apparent
epistemological reason for philosophy of education to limit itself to criticism, as in bringing to attention the contextual restrictions that restrain justification. In chapter four, however, I show that reconstructing elements of the presupposed communicative contexts of justification can be valuable. The illustration of my interpretation of irony as a philosophical tool showed, among other things, which taken-for-granted presuppositions may possibly lie hidden behind influential publications, such as those by Slavin and Maddin about dealing with the problem of so-called 'students at risk'. These publications might well be attuned to an audience that presupposedly blindly accepts the idea that education primarily revolves around the acquisition of language and cognitive skills, or the idea that, at all costs, we should prevent certain children in education from running the risk of lagging behind in terms of school results. Such a clarification of these ideas immediately raises the question of whether they are really as self-evident as they might be presupposed within the analysed communicative practices, which may be regarded as a success for the critical-reflective capability of the philosophy of education. Besides for the critical-reflective gain that this ironic analysis might render, the ironic analysis has furthermore generated insight into how the construction of meaning could (!) be understood on the basis of the exchange between the content of a claim and the communicative context within which that claim has been made. For that matter, my critical-reflective contribution to the philosophy of education can itself also be seen as a theoretical and content-specific contribution to the communication, which would imply that it can also only be understood in light of a reconstruction of the presuppositions that the speaker ascribes to their audience.

Viewed from the perspective of a discursive epistemology, each educational-philosophical contribution is itself thus inevitably both a theoretical contribution - since it is an amendment to the actual communicative context - and a critical contribution - since a part of the actual communicative context is always put up for discussion. Chapter six shows a second example of a theoretical and content-specific contribution to the educational-philosophical discourse. In this chapter, I make a substantiated proposal to understand a subject's learning to use a language in terms of an active participation in an ongoing practice-based negotiation on how the world is. This immediately shows that a philosophy of education that rejects epistemological privilege is perfectly capable of forcefully propagating and/or defending ideas. However, understood from a discursive epistemology, the acceptance of the claims, or the persuasive power of the arguments, can only be understood in light of the - perhaps occasionally adjusted - acceptability standards as applied by the audience in question - in this case an educational-philosophical audience, which
immediately eliminates any possibility of being able to establish epistemic certainty or general validity. The fact that this chapter - as were chapters two and four – were published in a peer-reviewed educational philosophical journal indicates that the claims and arguments that were put forward were found acceptable by at least a (small) part of the educational-philosophical audience.

It thus appears that a discursive epistemology does not set any direct conditions or limits as to what the philosophy of education should concern itself with, which confirms that the so-called ‘primacy of epistemology’ is done away with. I have tried to show that epistemological questions are indeed relevant to educational philosophers, but that they do not precede the query into the content of the discipline. Just like that query, they are simply part of the ongoing negotiation on how the world - of the philosophy of education - works. However, the query into the content of the philosophy of education and epistemological questions are not inseparable, as Cooper, for instance, seems to think (1998, p. 212). In light of the claim that knowledge claims have local validity, however, it is quite plausible to urge educational philosophers to exercise restraint when it comes to linking pretenses to their educational philosophical insights beyond the ‘boundaries’ of their own communicative practice - practical pretenses for instance.

Now that I have argued that the set of instruments available to philosophy of education is not limited beforehand, but that at minimum it is open to discussion as to which methods educational philosophers can use, it seems relevant to examine which conclusions may be drawn in relation to the subjects or topics to which the philosophy of education should, or could, apply itself. In line with the conclusion in chapter seven, it seems plausible that philosophers of education, like any other academic, should simply occupy themselves with conducting content-specific research in accordance with the common standards and methodological requirements for proper research. In this thesis I show that this research may be focused on different areas by concentrating on the philosophy of education as an academic discipline (chapters one, two, four, and eight), by taking a more empirical-scientific discussion - on how to deal with ‘students at risk’ - as a starting point for my illustrating analyses in chapter four, and by examining whether certain philosophical insight could lead to another (philosophical) understanding of the educational practice as regards to dealing with 'differential academic language proficiency' in chapter six. Chapter seven, however, also suggests that scientists should also assign themselves the task to critically question presuppositions that are deemed basic within their own discipline - in respect of the how, what, and why of discipline-based research activities, among other things. It
should be clear by now that this task has been focused on throughout this entire thesis, in the shape of a discussion of other educational philosophical positions on this subject (again, see chapters one, two, four, and eight), as well as in the development of my own position on the task and possibilities of philosophy of education.

A more content-related theme that I addressed at different times in this thesis was 'fighting exclusion'. Chapter two shows how this fight was the reason for antifoundationalist philosophers of education to call for a philosophy of education that limits itself to drawing attention to the constraints attached to any justification of educational claims. That way, the structural excluding effect of a justification would come into view, creating room for alternative contributions that could not have been envisaged before: alternative meanings, different 'embodied' personal viewpoints, or contributions from incommensurable discourses. Chapters four and six confronted us with educational debates that pay attention to attempts to ensure that certain groups of pupils will in future no longer structurally fall by the wayside where their school results are concerned. In view of these contributions, the desirability of fighting exclusion seems to be presupposed as taken-for-granted within the wider educational communicative practice.

Next, in chapter eight, I make a proposal for a certain approach towards 'fighting exclusion'. I argue that in an approach in which the primacy of commitment is related to the willingness to make, and defend, claims within a certain forum, exclusion might be best understood in terms of being excluded from participating in specific communicative practices. The exclusion may come about by applying acceptability standards within a certain communicative practice, which cannot be met due to a lack of communicative expertise, or simply because you are a certain person, belong to a certain group, or have certain characteristics. In general, I suggest that fighting against exclusion directly or indirectly always has to do with the putting up for discussion practice-based acceptability norms that are responsible for a certain exclusion. In relation to this, I propose in chapter six that in the attempts to let children not fall by the wayside when it comes to their development of academic language proficiency, it might be desirable to acknowledge children as full, active participants within the communicative practice in schools more and at an earlier stage, and to further exploit that aspect in the design of the curriculum.

An implication of my position, however, is that the fighting exclusion itself, as a standard, may also be put up for discussion. For instance, at several moments in this thesis I very clearly show myself in favor of applying quite strict standards for academic inquiry in general.
and in the philosophy of education in particular, and to also rigidly see to it that such standards are followed. This will entail a clear exclusion of certain contributions to the communication, unless it is able to successfully transform one or more of the standards prevailing at that moment.

With each task that I set for myself in this thesis, and at each moment that I explicitly addressed the tasks of the philosophy of education, as a speaker I wanted to contribute to the academic educational-philosophical discourse. Given my idea of the primacy of commitment, it is my own commitment that came to the fore. It is my own decision to make this contribution and to do so in this manner, with an eye to transforming – however small these changes may be – the educational-philosophical discourse. This reveals a subjective element in the way the educational philosophical communicative practice – like any other communicative practice - takes shape. The separate contributions to the communication may be biased by personal taste, moral disapproval, instinct, political conviction, philosophical preferences, etc., which will also leave their mark in the communicative practice as a whole. Besides for the epistemic or conventional ones, personal (existential, moral, political, and aesthetic) elements will thus also play a role in the evolution of communicative practices - including academic practices. This in no way means that communicative contributions, such as this thesis, could be reduced to being a product of subjective expression. After all, the commitment I refer to here is not subjective, but primarily communicative. It only finds expression in the concepts that are used and the methods that are elected to attune to a certain audience on the grounds of an - informed - assessment of the acceptability standards that are shared by that audience. Speakers are inevitably bound by the presuppositions deemed to be shared by their audiences; this is the case for the formation of their ideas, but certainly also for the expression and defense of those ideas. Here, the primacy of commitment ultimately means that I am driven to bring to the fore whatever I bring to the fore in reaction and attunement to the educational-philosophical forum, trying to do justice to that forum, but also wanting to transform it by means of my contribution, and that I feel the drive and responsibility to defend my contribution within that forum whenever there is doubt that I have sufficient reasons to make my claims, in other words: when my 'epistemic entitlement' is put up for discussion.

In light of these conclusions it becomes clear that a primacy of commitment in the philosophy of education does not have to erode the discipline’s academic rigor. On the contrary, my position shows that if academic disciplines wish to keep fulfilling their roles as critical-
reflective knowledge authorities, there is a clear task and responsibility for each individual academic to see to it that the prevailing criteria for academic endeavor are met, and that the tenability of those standards themselves are periodically assessed - especially in light of the question of whether, or not, a status of untouchability is unjustly ascribed to those very same criteria, be it intended or unintended. Thus, commitment does not seem to be a threat to ‘academic rigor', but rather a part of the process in which the value of this rigor, including the criteria that it implies, must be realized time and time again.

5. The possible contribution of the philosophy of education to practical-educational discourse

Finally, I wish to address the consequences of the foregoing for an idea about the practical relevance of the philosophy of education, a topic that of old has played a key role in the philosophy of education (see chapter one). Whereas within the educational-philosophical discourse the acceptability of a communicative contribution, for instance, will be more dependent on the extent to which the prevailing academic standards are met, within the practical-educational discourse the expected yield for solving a practical educational problem will be more decisive. This does, however, not imply that a mutual influence between the separable discourses is impossible. Contribution from the one discourse will certainly exert influence on the other because there may be 'umbrella questions', for instance. In both discourses, the goals of education may be questioned, for example. This only shows that a contribution from one communicative practice within the other will emerge in light of a different communicative context, so that it will also be attributed a different meaning. Whether within a discourse a contribution will be seen as relevant, may exert influence, and what that influence might possible be can, therefore, not be assessed within the communicative context of another discourse.

Hence, however, the potential interchange between philosophy of education and educational practice may take shape, it will assuredly not proceed according to any established pattern. Consequently, it will be impossible for philosophy of education to control its practical relevance or impact. Even if philosophy of education is to have any practical relevance, this would more likely be 'inspirational' rather than 'derivational'. Against that background, the notion of a philosophy of education that justifies its existence by referring to the role it might play in educational practice appears to be, at the very least, problematic. Nevertheless, the question of the practical relevance of philosophy of education has not yet been resolved. For now, as seen from the perspective set out above, the matter is simply that philosophy of education does not need to appeal to its
practical relevance in order to formulate its central tasks. After all, if a philosophical-educational discourse can be regarded as a distinct communicative practice, with its own central tasks, questions, concepts, methods of inquiry, and acceptability norms then this discourse has its own integrity, irrespective of other communicative practices. How, exactly, philosophy of education may perceive its own central task, or the way to fulfill such a task remains under discussion. It does not seem judicious to allow the content of philosophy of education to be determined by its potential impact on educational practice because this impact, if it even were to occur, cannot be predicted. For a philosopher of education to do so would be like an author to consider the actual writing of a book worthless unless he or she were assured in advance that readers would appreciate the work on his/her personal motivation for undertaking the endeavor. To do so would be to undervalue the specific integrity of the discipline and to overrate its capacity to control if and how its insights may be recognized and reproduced.

There are many ways of responding to the preceding conclusion. Some philosophers of education try to help their 'inspirational' impact along by focusing on questions (they believe to be) posed by educational practice. An example is the Philosophy of Education Society Great Britain issuing a series of publications - of which the title, 'IMPACT', is perhaps indicative of the organization's desired role in the practical debate - in which British educational policy is critically examined from a philosophical perspective (see f.i. Curren, 2009). The same happened in the Netherlands two decades ago when a number of eminent Dutch philosophers of education responded to the then minister of education's proposal that schools should take their role in upbringing more seriously (Ritzen, 1992). Analysis of such contributions of philosophers of education reveals an interesting difference between philosophical educational research and empirical educational research. Even though the efforts can be regarded as valuable - if only to show that philosophy is capable of dealing with real-life educational issues -, one may wonder what the actual impact that such publications on educational practice or educational policy-making has been. Over time, philosophical-educational research findings have come to meet significantly less recognition than have the outcomes of empirical-educational studies. In view of the preceding, this must be related to the role of acceptability norms in different communicative contexts. Evidently, the fact that something has been studied empirically has become incorporated as an acceptability norm in the

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9 They did so in a special issue of 'Pedagogisch tijdschrift. Forum voor opvoedkunde' (1992, Vol. 17, issue 2).
practical educational discourse - and most certainly so in communication about educational policy. This has led to a transformation in empirical-educational scholarship. The employment of 'empirical' as an important criterion by educational practice has induced academic researchers who aim to be practically relevant to increasingly see the making of 'evidence based' recommendations as their 'core business'. In this interplay between educational practice and educational science, it seems to be acceptable that many, previously current, practical educational insights that, by nature, lean towards the 'philosophical' simply disappear. The emphasis in the publications by both Slavin & Madden and Schweinhardt & Weikart on the quantitatively established effectivity of the programs they tested - and developed - for dealing with 'students at risk', for example, appears to mark a communicative process in which such research findings are the deciding factor in the choice of educational programs (see chapter four). Consequently, practical considerations that had previously played a central role - for instance, considerations relating to the aims of education; the school-readiness of children; or schools' ideological backgrounds - seem to fade away. In that sense, the far-reaching impact of empirical-pedagogical research on educational practice may constitute an enrichment in some respects, but definitely also an impoverishment in others.

6. References