



Educational Studies, Pedagogy and Education as a Discipline

Zongyi Deng

To cite this article: Zongyi Deng (24 Oct 2024): Educational Studies, Pedagogy and Education as a Discipline, British Journal of Educational Studies, DOI: [10.1080/00071005.2024.2418585](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2418585)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2418585>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 24 Oct 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 123




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Educational Studies, Pedagogy and Education as a Discipline

By ZONGYI DENG , IOE -Faculty of Education and Society, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT: This article continues the efforts of Gert Biesta and Jim Hordern to address the nature and organisation of educational studies as highlighted in a recent special issue titled ‘Educational studies today and for the future: threats, hopes, and collaborations’ in *BJES* (Volume 7, No. 5, 2023). The aim is to articulate a distinctive voice or language within the study of education, addressing contemporary challenges in the field. Invoking German *Pädagogik* and American educationalist Schwab’s theory of the Practical, this article makes a case for pedagogy as a distinctive discipline of education that has its own ways of thinking and theorising, centred on questions as to the purpose of education and the nature of educational practice. Furthermore, it asserts that pedagogy is a ‘practical’ discipline centred on understanding and developing educational practice. Conceived in this way, pedagogy can serve as a core and unifying component in educational studies, integrating the foundation disciplines and other subjects into the study of practice. It also functions as the ‘crowning’ discipline that organises foundation disciplines and related sources toward the professional education of teachers.

Keywords: Education as a discipline, pedagogy, Pädagogik, educational theory, teacher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Education studies, which frames the study of education in terms of the foundation disciplines (the philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history of education) and related subjects (comparative studies, curriculum studies, and so forth), has been the dominant tradition in the United Kingdom and the English-speaking world. However, this tradition has been in crisis since the late 1970s (Richardson, 2002). Its identity has been questioned for its lack of an independent way of thinking and theorising, relying instead on concepts and theories borrowed from psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, and other subjects (Biesta, 2023). As a result, it has been unable to defend its integrity and pursue

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

ISSN 0007-1005 (print)/ISSN 1467-8527 (online)

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

its own goals, particularly in the current context characterised by diverse political, social, and economic demands and forces (Biesta, 2023). Educational studies has also become increasingly fragmented and diversified as multiple and diverse discourses – such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, decolonisation theory, feminism, and so forth – lay claim to being ‘foundational’ areas of the study of education (Barrett and Hordern, 2021).

Educational studies, which dominated the functioning of teacher education from the 1960s to the late 1970s (Crook, 2002), has also been severely criticised for being irrelevant to work of school practitioners and for its disconnectedness from what they need to know in their day-to-day practices (Hordern *et al.*, 2021; McCulloch, 2017). Since the early 1980s, the role of universities in initial teacher education has been increasingly attacked and diminished by governments. The 1991 *Crawford Report* advocated for teacher preparation through practical, observational learning and mentor-guided experience. More recently, with a repositioning of initial teacher preparation as ‘a craft best learnt through observation and imitation of teachers in school settings’ (McIntyre *et al.*, 2019, p. 153), the conservative government in England has achieved ‘the diversification of teacher education providers and the increase in education stakeholders’ (Brooks, 2021, p. 2).

Within the tradition of educational studies, educational research is a field of inquiry that draws on a wide range of modes and methods from the foundation disciplines and other resources (McCulloch, 2002). However, this research has been under attack by governments for its questionable quality and its dubious contribution to educational policy and practice. Since the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014 – which replaced the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – universities in the UK have entered a new phase of competitive performativity (Power, 2023). REF evaluates not only the quality of research outputs but also, more importantly, the economic, social, and cultural impacts of research.

In a recent special issue in *BJES* (Vol. 71, No. 5), titled ‘Educational studies today and for the future: threats, hopes and collaborations’, the editors Peterson and Bryan (2023) rightfully identify the crisis as related to its nature and organisation. They ask questions about ‘the precise nature of educational studies’ and, crucially, about ‘how educational studies is – and is best – conceived and approached as a body of knowledge to be understood, interrogated and that is of educational and societal benefit’ (p. 473). Such questions, regarded as ‘existential questions’ about the very being of educational studies, are confronted directly by Jim Hordern and Gert Biesta in the issue. Hordern (2023) observes that a conception of educational practice that ‘guides processes of inquiry’ is largely lacking in educational studies because it is conceptualised as an applied field drawing on theoretical and methodological inputs from the foundation disciplines and related sources. As a result, the field does not have an ‘internal

language of description' and is unable to offer 'a systematic and coherent educational knowledge base' (p. 575). He calls for an alternative way of (re)configuring educational studies that pays a close attention to how practice is conceptualised and develops a sophisticated internal language of description 'developed around a constantly iterating discussion of what is "at stake" in education' (p. 579).

Like Hordern, Biesta (2023) questions the configuration of educational studies, which has been 'developed along multidisciplinary lines and as an applied field of study' (p. 498). Largely because of this multidisciplinary development, there is 'a remarkable blind spot in the set up of educational studies' – the lack of an explicit account of the object of study. Additionally, educational studies does not have its own 'forms of theory and theorising' that are distinctively educational (p. 502). Biesta calls for the necessity of articulating its own 'voice'—i.e., its own forms of theory and theorising – which is vital for defending the integrity of educational studies, particularly in the current context of the 'instrumentalisation of education and the push towards empirical research that is only interested in finding out what works' (p. 493). This requires an engagement with continental traditions in the study of education, particularly continental *Pädagogik* (Biesta, 2011, 2023).

This article continues the efforts of Biesta and Hordern to address issues concerning the nature and organisation of educational studies, aiming to articulate a distinctive voice or language in the study of education. Invoking German *Pädagogik* and American educationalist Schwab's theory of the Practical, it seeks to make a case for pedagogy as a distinctive discipline of education that has its own way of thinking and theorising, centred on the questions of what education is for and what educational practice entails. It is also a 'practical' discipline centrally concerned with the understanding and development of practice towards the advancement of education. Pedagogy, so conceived, constitutes 'a core and unifying component' (Richardson, 2002) in educational studies, bringing the foundation disciplines and other subjects into the study of practice, as well as into the initial education and professional development of teachers.

After a brief review of the nature and development of educational studies, I will explore the idea of education as an autonomous discipline with its own forms of theory and theorising by examining the German *Pädagogik* tradition. Next, I will introduce Schwab's theory of the Practical which can address certain issues facing *Pädagogik* and provide an additional theoretical basis needed for advancing pedagogy in England. Following this, I will discuss the construction of 'Life-Practice' pedagogics in China which, informed by the *Pädagogik* tradition and in the spirit of the Practical, offers an illustrative case of developing pedagogy in today's context. I will conclude by discussing the significance and implications of developing pedagogy as a response to the challenges facing educational studies today.

2. EDUCATIONAL STUDIES: A VOID AND A MISSING ELEMENT

In *Knowledge and the study of education*, Furlong and Whitty (2017) delineate diverse ‘knowledge traditions’ within the study of education worldwide, characterized by varied languages that define the field in different ways. In the UK education is primarily seen not as a singular discipline but rather as an *applied field* that relies on theoretical and methodological contributions from the foundation disciplines as well as related subjects. Therefore, education is ‘a colonised province’ with ways of thinking and theorising imported from ‘other’ disciplines and subjects (Biesta, 2023, p. 501). It is not an autonomous discipline in its own right and does not have its own distinctively ‘educational’ way of thinking and theorising (Biesta, 2011; Furlong and Whitty, 2017). Furthermore, it does not have its own research methodology. All the foundation disciplines and related subjects have each ‘staked a claim to be the key to understanding educational theory and practice’ and ‘involved specialisation in a particular mode of analysis, demanded a specific form of expertise’ (McCulloch, 2002, p. 103).

Such a configuration of the study of education originated from the intellectual pursuits of the initial British education professors – predominantly in the discipline of psychology – during the inter-war years. It was gradually developed to incorporate sociological and historical pursuit as many new professorial appointments were made in the history and sociology of education (Crook, 2002). The full articulation of educational studies as a multi-disciplinary field was not achieved until after the introduction of a new B.Ed. degree in 1964. This provided an occasion for Richard Peters and Paul Hirst, two eminent analytic philosophers, to lead the debates on the search for ‘degree worthiness’ in teacher training. With guidance from C.J. Gill, the Chief Inspector responsible for teacher training,¹ Peters ‘hammered out the structure within which educational studies in England and Wales would expand and develop over the coming two decades’ (Richardson, 2002, p. 18). The initial ‘structure’ comprised the four disciplines of educational philosophy, psychology, sociology, and history. Other subjects or disciplines also ‘staked a claim to be “foundational”, including comparative education, curriculum studies and even educational linguistics’ (Crook, 2002, p. 63). The foundation disciplines thus ‘were designed on the whole for teacher training purposes rather than for the academic study of education’ (McCulloch, 2017).

Unlike in the UK, in Germany and many Nordic countries the study of education has long been developed as an autonomous discipline called *Pädagogik*, which has its own way of thinking and theorising devoted to the serious study of education. It is also a discipline oriented toward the understanding and development of the professional practice of education (Biesta, 2011).

By this comparison, Biesta (2011) identifies a ‘void’ in educational studies in the UK – the absence of the idea of education as a discipline in its own right.

Consequently, the field does not have ‘its own forms of theory and theorising’ (p. 189) – or, as referred to in the current article, ‘its own way of thinking and theorising’. This is a ‘missing element’ in the UK tradition (Biesta, 2023, p. 495). This absence results from ‘a remarkable blind spot’ in the configuration of educational studies, namely the lack of an explicit account of the object of study – education – in its own right. Biesta (2023, p. 502) explains:

Although different disciplines can ask interesting and important questions about education, the question that outside of this set up is how disciplines that wish to study ‘education’ are able to identify their object of study. After all, even if one is able to identify a school, college or university, one cannot simply walk into such a building and ‘see’ education, as this needs a criterion for identifying what may *count* as education.

A thorough engagement with the fundamental question as to what education is, Biesta argues, is vital for articulating the integrity of education as a practice and of education as a field.

In fact, the lack of such a discipline – often referred to as *pedagogy* – in England has been lamented by many scholars. In ‘Why no pedagogy in England?’ Brian Simon (1981) observed that pedagogy did not exist in England, but it has an ‘honoured place’ in Europe. As a result, education studies was characterised by an ‘eclectic character, reflecting deep confusion of thought, and of aims and purposes, relating to learning and teaching’ (p.1). Teachers generally approached their teaching by blending practical considerations with their ideological beliefs, but not much beyond that. In ‘Still no pedagogy?’ Robin Alexander (2004) revisited Simon’s question and concluded that after two decades, pedagogy still had not been developed or adequately articulated in England. Consequently, the same kind of issues continued to plague the field. Teaching was perceived as solely a matter of teaching methods, apart from important considerations like educational purposes, the institutional curriculum, assessment, and school or classroom organisation. They were often regarded as ‘technicians who implement the educational ideas and procedures of others, rather than as professionals who reflect on these matters themselves’ (p. 11). In ‘Educational studies in the United Kingdom, 1940–2002’ William Richardson (2002) argues that because of the absence of pedagogy as ‘a core and unifying component’ of educational studies, the field has been unable to ‘bridge the academic concerns of the universities and professional concerns of the colleges’ and to ‘diminish the artificial separation of “theory” and “practice”’ (p. 19). The omission, he contends, is ‘indicative of the general difficulties of educationists in making a decisive theoretical contribution to practical problems in education’ (p. 21).

I now turn to elucidate the distinctive way of thinking and theorising in the German *Pädagogik* tradition. This exploration responds to Biesta’s (2011, p. 189) invitation to consider ‘the idea of education as a discipline in its own right with its own forms of theory and theorizing’ as a potential remedy for the

crisis in educational studies. Additionally, it addresses the calls from Simon, Alexander, and Richardson, advocating for pedagogy as a distinctive discipline in England.

3. PÄDAGOGIK – A DISTINCTIVE WAY OF THINKING AND THEORISING ABOUT EDUCATION

In Germany and many Nordic countries *Pädagogik* is positioned as a distinctive discipline focused on education, closely tied to ‘the practical process of education and to professions in the field’ (Terhart, 2017, p. 922). Its origins can be traced back to Johann Amos Comenius and Johann Friedrich Herbart. Of particular interest here is *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* that, rooted in the rich human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaftliche*) tradition, was developed notably by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Hermann Nohl (1879–1960), and Erich Weniger (1894–1961). *Pädagogik* is depicted as an autonomous discipline in its own right, with its own ‘educative, pedagogical ambitions’ and ‘ambitions of doing research’ (Terhart, 2017, p. 923).

Inherent in *Pädagogik* is an educational way of thinking and theorising that does not begin with “‘other’” disciplines and their perspectives on education’ but involves a substantive engagement with the fundamental question of what education is – the object of study – and with theorising its aims, functions, and core activities (Biesta, 2011, p. 184). In Germany there are (at least) two concepts, *Erziehung* and *Bildung*, that are used to depict the object of study and provide an explicit theoretical account of what education is.

Signifying education as a distinctive human enterprise, *Erziehung* construes education as purposeful activities or interactions ‘in which teachers . . . aim to influence the learning and formation processes of young people’ (Benner, 2017, p. 266). This concept refers to certain dialogues or communications and actions in which ‘certain influences bring about certain effects’ (Biesta, 2011, p. 184). As a human purposeful practice (*Erziehung*), education performs both formative and social functions; it encompasses ‘on the one hand, any help towards the process of becoming a human being . . . and, on the other hand, any help towards becoming part of the life of society’ (p. 184).

Foregrounding the formative function or purpose of education, *Bildung* refers to the formation of the self which entails the development of the full potential of an individual. More specifically, it involves the cultivation of human powers – understanding, capabilities, or abilities – through interactions with the world, encompassing the physical, cultural, and social realms (Humboldt, 2000). *Bildung* is particularly concerned with the cultivation of capabilities for self-determination and co-determination, as well as fostering the dispositions of freedom and responsibility (Klafki, 2000) – a process vital to the formation of individuals to be independent and responsible human beings (Klafki, 1998).

Bildung plays a crucial role in safeguarding the autonomy of education as human undertaking in the face of external political, social, and cultural influences and demands. German educationists emphasise the right of children to develop into independent and responsible human beings (*Bildung*), arguing that education as a human practice (*Erziehung*) should not be subordinate to external influences and demands – whether religious, political, or commercial (Uljens, 2023). They advocate for ‘educational teaching’ – *Erziehung* directed toward *Bildung* – a unique form of practice oriented toward encouraging and supporting children in their self-formation processes (Biesta, 2011).

In short, *Erziehung* and *Bildung* together yield a way of thinking and theorising that is distinctively educational. Nevertheless, what education as individual formation (*Bildung*) and as a human purposeful undertaking (*Erziehung*) entail need to be explored and further articulated within particular social, economic, and cultural contexts, with respect to particular educational situations. This, as will be shown in the final section, is vital to the development of pedagogy as a discipline in today’s world.

Furthermore, it is important to note that *Pädagogik* is not merely a theoretical discipline like the philosophy of education. It is also a discipline of educational practice and for educational practice (Klafki, 1998). A central task of *Pädagogik* is ‘the clarification of educational practice with the intention to contribute to the improvement of educational practice’ (Biesta, 2011, p. 186) – a responsibility central to *Didaktik* within *Pädagogik*. *Didaktik* provides a theory of teaching and learning embedded within the societal, institutional, and instructional contexts of schooling, addressing issues related to state curriculum planning, development, and classroom implementation (Hopmann, 2007).

This brings us to another important concept – *the dignity of practice* – and a distinctive way of theorising about practice that flows from it. Practice is regarded as having its own ‘dignity’ that makes it independent of and takes priority over theory. As Schleiermacher explained,

... practice is much older than theory, so that it can simply not be said that practice gets its own definite character only with theory. The dignity of practice is independent of theory; practice only becomes more conscious with theory. (Schleiermacher, 1826/1983, cited in Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017, p. 122)

On this account, practice constitutes the essential point of reference for theorising or theory development. The ‘only legitimate approach to theory building’, Gundem (2000) contends, ‘is to examine the educational phenomena as they exist in the practice of teaching and schooling’ (p. 241). Similarly, Weniger (2000) argues that theorising ‘proceeds from the actuality of the order of teaching, from the real-world educational situation’ (p. 113).

On the other hand, theorising requires bringing to bear external theoretical resources to understand and analyse practice. However, issues of practice take

precedence over all external theories, determining which theories are to be employed. Theories serve a ‘serving and subordinate’ role, used in the service of illuminating, interpreting and theorising about practice (Künzli, 2013).

So far, I have argued that *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* provides a framework for considering the development of pedagogy as discipline in its own right – a void in educational studies in England as noted earlier – alongside a mode of thinking and theorising that is genuinely educational – a missing element in the UK tradition as mentioned above. Before I proceed to advocate the development of pedagogy informed by *Pädagogik* as a possible response to the challenges facing educational studies in England, in what follows I highlight some inherent issues in *Pädagogik* that in part contributed to the ‘empirical turn’ in the study of education in Germany. These issues need to be dealt with if we are to find a viable and promising way to construct pedagogy as a discipline in England.

4. EMPIRICAL TURN AND CRISIS IN PÄDAGOGIK

In the late 1960s Germany witnessed the ‘empirical turn’ in educational theory and research, characterised by an enthusiastic borrowing of various educational theories from the USA, along with social research methodologies. *Pädagogik* faced criticism for its lack of empirical research, and the notion of *Bildung* was increasingly replaced by ‘psychological and sociological concepts such as qualification, socialisation, integration, and learning’ (Biesta, 2002, p. 379). This turn eventually led to the development of *Erziehungswissenschaft* (the modern science of education) and *Bildungsforschung* (research on education as an interdisciplinary field) (Terhart, 2012).

Education research (*Bildungsforschung*) thus becomes a multidisciplinary field of study characterised by a pluralism of theories and methodologies borrowed from psychology, sociology, economics, and other social sciences, along with an all-encompassing understanding of education covering ‘ultimately every facet of life, human existence, society, etc’ (Terhart, 2017). This approach resembles the tradition of educational studies in the UK. The science of education (*Erziehungswissenschaft*) replaces *Pädagogik* to become the dominant paradigm. Dominated by educational psychology and quantitative empirical methods, research is no longer ‘educational’ or ‘educative’, but a scientific enterprise characterised by:

... following a narrow and technocratic model of human practice, reducing education to learning or competence, missing the genuine pedagogical character of the educational field, and just adding isolated results without a genuine and leading concept of education, development and individual growth in social contexts and the wider society. (Terhart, 2017, p. 929)

It has been observed that the development of the science of education (*Erziehungswissenschaft*) has been far less successful than anticipated.

Additionally, education research (*Bildungsforschung*) has had only a very limited impact on policy and practice (Terhart, 2017).

The lack of success in the development of the science of education would not be surprising to anyone familiar with Joseph Schwab's diagnosis of American curriculum theory and research in the late 1960s – a diagnosis that also holds relevance for American educational theory and research more broadly. According to Schwab (1970/2013), the curriculum field, in particular, and the educational field, in general, are 'moribund' due to the undue reliance on methods and principles derived from the social sciences (psychology, sociology, economics). However, this verdict was largely ignored by German educationists in their enthusiastic embrace of American mainstream educational theory and research (Künzli, 2013).

It has been argued that the Practical, introduced as an innovative paradigm that transforms how we approach theory, practice, and research in curriculum studies in a series of 'practical' papers (Schwab, 1971, 1973, 1983, 2013), provides a promising way to address the challenges facing *Pädagogik* and to revitalise the discipline (Deng, 2024; Künzli, 2013). '[O]f all the US curriculum researchers', Künzli (2013) asserts, 'it is Schwab who offers many productive starting points to the curriculum research in German-speaking Europe' – and, I argue, to educational theory and research in general. However, the Practical, which is highly compatible with *Pädagogik*, has not been adequately received or recognised by German educationists (Künzli, 2013).

5. THE PRACTICAL, THE CONSTRUCTION OF PEDAGOGY, AND RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

I now outline how Schwab diagnosed the crisis in American curriculum theory and research and how he proposed a resolution to the crisis. I do this because, like Künzli, I believe that the Practical offers a viable way of revitalising *Pädagogik* in response to the challenges posed by the empirical turn. More importantly, I contend that it provides a theoretical foundation essential for advancing pedagogy in England in response to the ongoing crisis in educational studies.

Drawing on Aristotelian philosophy, Schwab (2013) distinguished between ways of knowing in 'theoretic' disciplines (such as mathematics, physics, and metaphysics) – which aim to generate theories for the sake of understanding – and 'practical' disciplines (such as politics, theology, and ethics) – which focus on doing and decision-making to improve practice. He argues that curriculum studies has been inadequately positioned as a 'theoretic' field, with its tasks being understood within the context of education foundations (American equivalents to foundation disciplines in England) and social sciences (Westbury, 2013). Due to the reliance on the ways of knowing in these disciplines, the field has been unable to connect directly and centrally with

practices – including curriculum planning, development, and enactment or classroom teaching (Westbury, 2013). It ‘is unable, by its present methods and principles, to continue its work and contribute significantly to the advancement of education’ (Schwab, 2013, p. 591). This diagnosis, as I have argued elsewhere (Deng, 2021), also applies to the crisis in educational studies in England.²

Schwab advocated for a ‘re-envisioning’ of curriculum studies as a fundamentally ‘practical’ undertaking, centrally focused on the understanding and development of practices toward the advancement of education.³ However, this approach requires fully engaging with theories from the foundation disciplines and social sciences as essential resources for comprehending the complexities of education and schooling. Such an undertaking necessitates a radically different form of inquiry and theorising that marries the ‘practical’ and ‘theoretic’ ways of knowing (Westbury, 2005). First and foremost, the approach to research and theorising must begin with and focus on issues related to practices as deliberative, decision-making processes within the socio-cultural and institutional contexts of schools and classrooms. In other words, echoing the notion of the dignity of practice noted above, the ‘practical’ affairs of schools and classrooms provide the essential point of reference for research and theory development.

Second, theories from psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, and other fields are brought to bear on the study and theorising of practice in an eclectic and critical manner (Schwab, 1973, 2013). According to Schwab (2013), all theory is incomplete and partial; it highlights certain facets of phenomena but thrusts other facets into the background. All theory also entails a ‘special bias [partiality of view] imposed on the selection and interpretation of facts’ (p. 660).⁴ Through the ‘eclectic arts’, curriculum scholars ‘discover and take practical account of the distortions and limited perspective which a theory imposes on its subject’ (p. 323) and adjust the theory for practical considerations. They then integrate various theories to create a more comprehensive ‘whole’ for addressing issues and problems related to practice and the inner workings of schooling. In other words, they use various theories in combination ‘without paying the full prices of their incompleteness and partiality’ (Schwab, 2013, p. 600). The limited space at my disposal prevents a full discussion of the eclectic arts. Interested readers are encouraged to consult Schwab’s (1971) ‘The practical: Arts of eclectic’.

The Practical, together with *Pädagogik*, I now argue, provides a way forward for the development of pedagogy in response to the crisis in educational studies in England. Two propositions are made based on the discussion above. First, pedagogy needs to be positioned as a discipline of education in its own right, with its own way of thinking and theorising. This requires engaging with foundational questions about what education is and theorising its purpose, functions, and activities in today’s context. In other words, it needs to develop its own forms of theory and theorising (Biesta, 2011). This proposition

addresses the blind spot and missing element in the configuration of educational studies as noted earlier. Second, pedagogy needs to be conceived as a ‘practical’ discipline centrally concerned with the understanding and development of practice in context, with its distinctive approach to research and theorising as called for in the Practical. This (second) proposition ensures that educational theory and theorising are relevant and meaningful to the work of practitioners, thus addressing the criticisms mentioned at the beginning. Furthermore, the proposition requires an eclectic approach to studying practice – embedded within the socio-cultural, institutional, and instructional contexts – by drawing on a wealth of theoretical sources from the foundation disciplines and other fields. This approach, as I will further argue in the concluding section, provides a viable way for educationists in foundation disciplines to make theoretical contributions to practical problems in education and schooling, as called for by Richardson, as noted above.

To illustrate the development of such a discipline, I will now examine the construction of Life-Practice pedagogics in China. I use the term ‘pedagogics’ rather than ‘pedagogy’ to remain consistency with my previous writings on the study of education in China (e.g., Deng, 2013, 2023). This discussion will revisit and expand upon the research presented in those earlier publications.

6. THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIFE-PRACTICE PEDAGOGICS: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Undertaken by Lan Ye and her colleagues at East China Normal University, the development of Life-Practice Pedagogics was an integral part of the New Basic Education (NBE) – a comprehensive reform programme aimed to transform elementary and secondary schools amid the profound social, economic, and educational transitions occurring in China at the turn of the twenty-first century. These transitions were driven by globalisation, a rapidly growing market economy, and the emergence of information technology, among other factors. With over two hundred schools participating across twelve provinces and cities, the NBE has had significantly impacted school and classroom practices in China.

Throughout the course of the NBE, Lan Ye and her colleagues endeavoured to construct Life-Practice Pedagogics aimed at developing students’ abilities to self-regulate, think reflectively, and cultivate self-confidence and courage to face challenges in their current and future lives and work (Ye, 2009a, 2009b). This construction instantiates the two propositions noted above.

In the early 1900s, pedagogics made its way into China through Japan, via translated Japanese texts on Herbart’s and Herbartian theories. Subsequently, other pedagogic theories from Continental Europe, including those of Pestalozzi and Montessori, were introduced and left a lasting impact on Chinese pedagogical thinking and practice. Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Soviet pedagogic theories, derived from European

origins, played a pivotal role in shaping the Chinese pedagogical tradition. Kairov's pedagogics, rooted in Marxism as the exclusive methodological basis, emerged as the 'standard paradigm' (Deng, 2013). This paradigm, however, experienced a state of crisis due to its adherence to political ideologies, its preoccupation with transmitting disciplinary knowledge, skills, and attitudes, its neglect of the development of independent individuals, and its detachment from school practice and realities (Ye, 2009a).

In Life-Practice pedagogics Ye Lan attempts to shift the focus from merely transmitting content (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to cultivating individuals who possess intellectual, moral, and spiritual capabilities. Following Herbart, Ye positions pedagogics as a distinctive discipline of education aimed at the promotion of the meaningful growth and development of individuals' lives, spirits, and potential (Ye, 2009a), reflecting the first proposition discussed above. This discipline is informed by the vision of advancing education in the NBE, which seeks to develop 'future citizens with the qualities of independent thinking and independent personalities, and to also instill in them a sense of collective [social] responsibility' (Ye, 2009b, p. 584).

Underlying Life-Practice pedagogics is a way of thinking and theorising that is distinctively educational, in which the concepts of *Erziehung*, *Bildung*, and the dignity of practice find their manifestations. The construction of Life-Practice pedagogics began with a substantive engagement with the fundamental question of what education is – the object of study – through a review of various definitions of education in the literature on pedagogics, largely within China. This review led to an 'internal' definition that, echoing *Erziehung*, interprets education as 'social activities that directly and consciously aim at influencing the intellectual, moral, psychological and physical development of individuals' (Ye, 2015, p. 182). Using this conception as a starting point, Ye (2015) postulates that education performs both internal and external functions. Internally, education has the capacity to directly shape the multifaceted growth of individuals; externally, it can indirectly impact society's political, cultural, and economic development through its influence on individuals.

These two functions are achieved through the formation of the individual as a human subject – or, in *Pädagogik* terms, through *Bildung* as individual formation. Ye emphasises the development of individuals who have nurtured life-awareness – a concept that will be elaborated on later – through practice or engagement with the world (Deng, 2023). These two notions – education as purposeful activities (*Erziehung*) and education as individual formation (*Bildung*) – together call for a special form of practice, namely Life-Practice, centred on the value of life and the development of life-awareness. This conception of practice, which will be further elaborated below, constitutes the focus and an essential starting point for the construction of Life-Practice pedagogics.

Over the course of the NBE, Ye further articulates these two fundamental concepts – education as individual formation and as purposeful social activities –

within the contemporary context of China, informed by Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions. The central goal of education is the formation of individuals who can take the initiative, make choices, direct their own lives, and control their own destinies. The formation involves the ‘cultivation of life-awareness’ [育生命自觉] – the development of self-determination, self-selection, self-responsibility, and intellectual capabilities that allow individuals to transcend themselves and to achieve self-realisation and self-perfection (Ye, 2015). This is achieved through ‘teaching knowledge on heaven, earth, and human affairs’ [教天地人事], which refers to teaching school subjects derived from mathematics, natural sciences, geography, humanities, and other domains of human knowledge.

Furthermore, similar to *Pädagogik*, Ye positions pedagogics as a discipline of and for practice, with its central task being to expound and elaborate on the ‘reasons and ‘logics’ of practice. This aligns with the second proposition mentioned earlier. Echoing the concept of the dignity of practice, Ye believes that practice provides an indispensable starting point for pedagogical inquiry and theorising, rather than relying on perspectives from disciplines such as psychology and philosophy. Although Ye does not cite Schwab directly, her approach to research and theorising reflects the Practical’s recommendations.

The initial phase of developing Life-Practice pedagogics involved a thorough examination of various issues related to practices amidst significant social and educational transformations in China. These included new expectations for human development, emerging challenges in education and schooling, and the complexities of implementing basic education (Ye, 2009a, 2009b). Understanding these issues was crucial for constructing or reconstructing pedagogical concepts and principles related to educational goals, curriculum content, teaching methods, evaluation, and school management (Ye, 2009a). Eclecticism is emphasised, as the NBE requires integrating diverse theories from philosophy, psychology, and other social sciences to ‘bravely explore new paths in education research’ that can facilitate transformative practice (Ye, 2009b, p. 590).⁵ These theories are utilised to investigate these issues and to (re)construct relevant pedagogical concepts and principles.

To ensure that educational theory and theorising are relevant and meaningful to the work of practitioners, Ye and her colleagues tested, refined, and reconstructed these concepts and principles in school and classroom settings, working closely with school practitioners. Throughout the course of the NBE, they developed a unique form of collaborative school-based research that necessitates close collaboration between university researchers and school practitioners, with the former playing an active and ‘deeply intervening’ role (Ye, 2009a). As Ye (2009a) notes,

We conducted innovation research on school reform side by side with educational practitioners in the school who were willing to participate in the reform

experiments. While we were attempting to change existing school education, we were also exploring the possibility of creating new types of schools. (p. 19)

In schools, university professionals not only gain a firsthand understanding of the issues and problems confronting practice but also, through collaboration with school practitioners, actively participate in planning and implementing ways to reform practice (Ye, 2009a). As university professionals and school practitioners examine complex issues and problems together, they reconstruct both theory and practice simultaneously. Furthermore, they transform theory into ‘the facilities and structure of the school, its administration principles and organizational structure, its teaching plans and syllabus, and into any other practices relating to school education’ (Ye, 1999, p. 164, cited in Ye, 2009a, p. 595).

7. DISCUSSION

I have explored the idea of education as a distinctive discipline as a potential response to the crisis in educational studies. By invoking German *Pädagogik* and Schwab’s theory of the Practical, I make a case for pedagogy as a relatively autonomous discipline of education, with its way of thinking and theorising about the purpose of education and the nature of educational practice. I argue that pedagogy is also a ‘practical’ discipline centrally concerned with the understanding and development of educational practice. It employs a ‘practical’ approach to research and theorising, ensuring that theory and research are relevant to both practice and the world of schooling.

Needless to say, developing such a pedagogy in England will face significant obstacles and challenges. These include the entrenched ‘applied’ tradition of educational studies, the overwhelming emphasis on the marketisation of universities, and the gripping influence of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) on educational theory and research, among others (see Furlong, 2013; Morris *et al.*, 2023). These obstacles and challenges must be addressed or overcome if we are truly committed to the development, although a full discussion of them is beyond the scope of the article.

This article aims to articulate a unique voice or language in the study of education, as called for by Biesta and Hordern. This task takes on greater significance and urgency given the proliferation of expectations and demands on education and educational practice. Education is required to pass on a body of ‘essential knowledge’ that acculturates students into society. It is expected to provide students with competences that they need to succeed in the twenty-first century. Additionally, education is mandated to turn students into good citizens in a democratic society. Furthermore, education is required to instil a sense of environmental stewardship and sustainability, alongside fostering empathy and compassion towards others. And this list of expectations can continue. In all these expectations, education is treated as something without its own integrity; it

is merely subordinate to external interests, demands, and forces. Accordingly, educational practice becomes merely a means to achieve all these expectations or outcomes – whether it be the acquisition of knowledge, the development of competences, or the instilment of values and attitudes. It becomes nothing more than a tool to external ends.

This article challenges these instrumental conceptions of education by articulating a way of thinking and theorising that is genuinely educational, thus defending the notion that education is a human enterprise in its own right, with an integrity of its own. As signified by *Bildung*, education has an intrinsic and non-instrumental purpose – the formation of human subjects to become autonomous and independent beings with fully developed capabilities, capable of their own choices, and taking individual and social responsibility. This central purpose is vital to other goals of education: human flourishing, cultural continuity, social cohesion, economic prosperity, and more (Deng, 2020). As implied in *Erziehung*, educational practice is ‘not only *framed* but is actually *constituted* by its purpose’ (Biesta, 2015, p. 199). Educative teaching goes beyond merely transferring knowledge and orchestrating students’ ‘fruitful’ encounters with content in a way that opens up numerous opportunities for the formation of autonomous, independent, and responsible individuals, as well as the cultivation of intellectual, moral, and social powers or capabilities (Deng, 2022). In this regard, practice has its own dignity that takes precedence over external demands and expectations, as noted earlier.

The concepts of education as individual formation (*Bildung*) and as purposeful activities, along with the notion of the dignity of practice, support the establishment of education as a distinctive discipline with its own relative autonomy. This autonomy allows the discipline to pursue goals related to its advancement in both theory and practice. This does not mean that we should insulate ourselves from those external demands and retreat to a realm of private interests and aspirations, albeit highly educational. Instead, we should engage with external demands in manner that reaffirms the central commitment or ideal of education – the formation of independent, responsible, and fully-developed individuals – and respond to those demands in educational terms. For this, the construction of Life-Practice pedagogics is a case in point. It is instructive to adopt the non-affirmative position developed by Dietrich Benner and further articulated by Michael Uljens. To secure the autonomy of educational theory and theorising, education needs to be seen in ‘non-hierarchical relations to politics, culture and economy’ (Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017, p. 38). It is neither ‘superordinate’ nor ‘subordinate’ to political, social and economic demands and expectations. The implication is that educational theorists need to engage with – but not affirm or yield to – extant political and economic demands and expectations.

Making a case for such a discipline contributes to addressing the void in the makeup of educational studies – the lack of pedagogy – as first discerned by

Brian Simon and continued to be lamented by Brian Davies, Robin Alexander, and William Richardson, as noted already. By arguing that pedagogy is a ‘practical’ discipline centrally concerned with the understanding and development of practice broadly construed (see Deng, 2024),⁶ this article serves to ‘refocus and problematise the study of teaching and learning alongside the creation of a national curriculum for England and Wales in 1988’ as called for by Simon (Hudson, 2024, p. 366). Furthermore, this discipline necessitates a fuller, more sophisticated investigation of the practice of teaching which entails, as Alexander (2001), p. 511) calls for, locating practice ‘within the concentric circles of local and national, and of classroom, school, system and state’ and ‘marrying’ the study of practice with the foundation disciplines and other external sources (Alexander, 2009) – a point which will be clearer in what follows.

This article can also be seen as a continuation of the efforts of Denis Lawton and Lawrence Stenhouse to make educational studies relevant to schooling and education through curriculum studies. Both Lawton and Stenhouse believed that curriculum studies could serve as a ‘bridge’ bringing together the foundation disciplines and other sources to examine curriculum and related educational issues, and to confront the challenges of relating theory to practice (McCulloch, 2002, 2017). This article employs pedagogy – a conception that, broadly construed, subsumes curriculum – as the vehicle for integrating the foundation disciplines and other subjects into the study of education and educational practice (also see Deng, 2024). It extends Lawton’s and Stenhouse’s efforts by advocating for the establishment of pedagogy as a distinct discipline, characterised by a unique way of thinking and theorising essential for advancing education. This includes a ‘practical’ approach to educational research and theory that ensures relevance and impact in practice and the real-world context of schooling. Additionally, this article attempts contribute to advancing educational research as ‘a unitary and autonomous kind of study in its own right’ – a field that the British Educational Research Association (BERA) has sought to establish since its establishment in 1974 (McCulloch, 2002, p. 112).

Last but not least, establishing such a discipline means articulating and defending the unique contribution that universities offer to the study of education. Pedagogy can constitute the ‘crowning’ discipline that organises the foundation disciplines and related theoretical sources towards the professional education of teachers. As I have argued elsewhere (Deng, 2024), universities can play a crucial role in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and ongoing professional development by reshaping educational theory and research in ways that are relevant to practice and the professional education of teachers. This is why I contend that pedagogy should be recognised as a ‘practical’ discipline focused on understanding and improving practice within the socio-cultural and institutional contexts of schooling, aimed at enhancing education overall. Such a discipline can act as a bridge, integrating the foundation disciplines and

other theoretical sources to inform the study and development of practice. Teachers are given the chance to engage with essential questions about the purposes of education and to gain a well-informed understanding of teaching as a social, institutional, practical, and reflective endeavour. They also have provided with opportunities to link their practices to broader educational goals and the institutional curriculum to cultivate educational and *Didaktik* thinking. More research is needed to explore these various tasks further.

This article confronts the challenges facing educational studies by bringing to bear two alternative traditions – German *Pädagogik* and Schwab's theory of the Practical – on the discussion. This can be seen as a response to the invitation of Biesta (2012) to engage with continental tradition of *Pädagogik* in order to 'generate *educational* ways of understanding, approaching and "doing" education'. It can also be interpreted as a response to the call of Furlong and Whitty who urge us to recognise 'the vast intellectual resources enshrined in different traditions' and to 'make those different traditions visible' (Furlong and Whitty, 2017, pp. 49–50). As a conclusion to this article, their message is worth quoting at length:

Education as a field of study does face serious challenges as it tries to respond to the even-increasing demands made on it in the increasingly globalised, competitive world of school and university systems. But despite those challenges, real though they are, what we have come to recognise is the huge intellectual resources enshrined in the different traditions we have identified. By rendering those different traditions visible, our hope is that those with a commitment to the study of Education, from whatever perspectives, will be better able to contribute to the debate about the future of this vitally important area of scholarship. (pp. 49–50)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful for the very meaningful comments of two anonymous reviewers on an earlier version of this paper. In particular, the author would like to express immense gratitude to the BJES editor, Andrew Peterson, for his careful review of the paper and his detailed and constructive feedback.

10. NOTES

1. C.J. Gill was responsible for developing and guiding teacher training policies, improving standards, and shaping the structure of teacher education in England. At a conference in March 1964, organized by the Ministry of Education and various universities and colleges, he argued, 'The entire educational system in this country appears to be in a state of flux, allowing for significant changes... Traditional methods of organizing education, teaching children, and training teachers are being questioned' (Simon, 1991, pp. 375–376).
2. The crisis stems from the fact that education has been inappropriately positioned as

a multi-disciplinary academic field, where the development of disciplinary understanding is seen as the primary goal. This approach relies on principles and methods borrowed from the foundation disciplines and related sources. Due to this inadequate positioning, educational theory has become increasingly irrelevant and impractical for schoolteachers and practitioners (Deng, 2021). The field is thus 'experiencing a crisis of principle' and is 'unable, by its present methods and principles, to continue its work and contribute to the advancement of education' (Schwab, 2013, p. 591).

3. His vision of education is shaped by a form of liberal education focused on developing individuals' intellectual abilities and moral reasoning through academic disciplines. This approach is supported by a liberal curriculum that fosters discussions, debates, and practical inquiry within a 'learning community' (Reid, 1984).
4. Take Marxist and Neo-Marxist critical curriculum theories as an example. While these perspectives offer valuable insights into the reproduction of hierarchical social structures through power dynamics and class struggle, they tend to overlook aspects such as social and economic development, cultural continuity, and cultural innovation. Moreover, they do not consider that hierarchical structures might be based on competence, qualifications, and mutual consent, rather than solely on 'tyrannical power' and class conflict (Peterson, 2018). As a result, Marxist and Neo-Marxist critical curriculum theories highlight how the curriculum perpetuates and reproduces existing inequalities within the social order and encourage critical examination of the power and political dynamics behind the curriculum process. However, they do not address how the curriculum can contribute to the academic, social, cultural, and personal goals of schooling as a public institution (see Goodlad, 1984).
5. Eclecticism here refers only to drawing on multiple sources and does not yet encompass Schwab's concept of the eclectic arts.
6. Practice can include not only classroom teaching, but also policy-making, curriculum planning, and curriculum development, among other activities.

11. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

12. ORCID

Zongyi Deng  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8068-382X>

13. REFERENCES

- Alexander, R. J. (2001) Border crossings: towards a comparative pedagogy, *Comparative Education*, 37 (4), 507–523. doi: 10.1080/03050060120091292.
- Alexander, R. J. (2004) Still no pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 34 (1), 7–33. doi: 10.1080/0305764042000183106.
- Alexander, R. J. (2009) Towards a comparative pedagogy. In R. Cowen and A. M. Kazamias (Eds) *International Handbook of Comparative Education* (Dordrecht, Springer), 923–939.

- Barrett, B. and Hordern, J. (2021) Rethinking the foundations: towards powerful professional knowledge in teacher education in the USA and England, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53 (2), 153–165. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2021.1887359](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1887359).
- Benner, D. (2017) John Dewey. A modern thinker: on education (as *Bildung* and *Erziehung*) and democracy (as a political system and a mode of associated living). In L. J. Waks and A. R. English (Eds) *John Dewey's Democracy and Education: A Centennial Handbook* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 263–278.
- Biesta, G. (2002) How general can *Bildung* be? Reflections on the future of a modern educational ideal, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36 (3), 377–390.
- Biesta, G. (2011) Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: a comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and continental construction of the field, *Pedagogy Culture & Society*, 19 (2), 175–192. doi: [10.1080/14681366.2011.582255](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2011.582255).
- Biesta, G. (2012) Wanted, dead or alive: educationalists. On the need for academic bilingualism in education. In M. Geiss, C. Aubry, V. Magyar, and D. Miller (Eds) *Positionierungen* (Weinheim, Beltz Verlag), 20–34.
- Biesta, G. (2015) Improving education through research? From effectiveness, causality and technology to purpose, complexity and culture, *Policy Futures in Education*, 14 (2), 194–210. doi: [10.1177/1478210315613900](https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210315613900).
- Biesta, G. (2023) The integrity of education and the future of educational studies, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 71 (5), 493–515. doi: [10.1080/00071005.2023.2242452](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2242452).
- Brooks, C. (2021) *Initial Teacher Education at Scale: Quality Conundrums* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- Crook, D. (2002) Educational studies and teacher education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50 (1), 57–75. doi: [10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00191](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00191).
- Deng, Z. (2013) The practical and reconstructing Chinese pedagogics, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45 (5), 652–667. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2013.818718](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2013.818718).
- Deng, Z. (2020) *Knowledge, Content, Curriculum Theory and Didaktik: Beyond Social Realism* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- Deng, Z. (2021) Constructing ‘powerful’ curriculum theory, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53 (2), 179–196. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2021.1887361](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1887361).
- Deng, Z. (2022) Powerful knowledge, educational potential and knowledge-rich curriculum: pushing the boundaries, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 54 (5), 599–617. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2022.2089538](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2022.2089538).
- Deng, Z. (2023) Understanding Life-Practice Pedagogics—A Distinctively Educational Way of Thinking and Theorizing With Chinese Characteristics, *ECNU Review of Education*, Advance online publication. doi: [10.1177/20965311231196313](https://doi.org/10.1177/20965311231196313)
- Deng, Z. (2024) Practice, pedagogy and education as a discipline: getting beyond close-to-practice research, *British Educational Research Journal*, 50 (2), 772–793. doi: [10.1002/berj.3951](https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3951).
- Furlong, J. (2013) *Education – an Anatomy of the Discipline: Rescuing the University Project?* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- Furlong, J. and Whitty, G. (2017) Knowledge traditions in the study of education. In G. Whitty and J. Furlong (Eds) *Knowledge and the Study of Education: An International Exploration* (Oxford, Symposium Books), 13–57.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1984) *A Place Called School. Prospects for the Future* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company).
- Gundem, B. B. (2000) Understanding European didactics. In B. Moon, M. Ben-Peretz, and S. Brown (Eds) *Routledge International Companion to Education* (Abingdon, Routledge), 235–262.

- Hopmann, S. (2007) Restrained teaching: the common cores of *Didaktik*, *European Educational Research Journal*, 6 (2), 109–124. doi: [10.2304/eerj.2007.6.2.109](https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2007.6.2.109).
- Hordern, J. (2023) Educational studies and educational practice: a necessary engagement, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 71 (5), 567–583. doi: [10.1080/00071005.2023.2213310](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2213310).
- Hordern, J., Muller, J., and Deng, Z. (2021) Towards powerful educational knowledge? Addressing the challenges facing educational foundations, curriculum theory and *Didaktik*, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53 (2), 143–152. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2021.1891575](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1891575).
- Hudson, B. (2024) Why no subject didactics in England? In H. J. Vollmer Helmut and M. Rothgangel (Eds) *General Subject Didactics: Comparative Insights into Subject Didactics as Academic Disciplines* (Münster, Waxmann), 359–384.
- Humboldt, W. V. (2000) Theory of *Bildung*. In I. Westbury, S. Hopmann, and K. Riquarts (Eds) *Teaching as a Reflective Practice: The German Didaktik Tradition* (Mahwah, Erlbaum), 57–61.
- Klafki, W. (1998) Characteristics of critical constructive *Didaktik*. In B. B. Gudem and S. Hopmann (Eds) *Didaktik And/Or Curriculum: An International Dialogue* (New York, Peter Lang), 307–330.
- Klafki, W. (2000) *Didaktik* analysis as the core of preparation. In I. Westbury, S. Hopmann, and K. Riquarts (Eds) *Teaching as a Reflective Practice: The German Didaktik Tradition* (Mahwah, Erlbaum), 139–159.
- Künzli, R. (2013) Memorizing a memory: Schwab’s the practical in a German context, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45 (5), 668–683. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2013.798837](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2013.798837).
- McCulloch, G. (2002) ‘Disciplines Contributing to Education?’ Educational studies and the disciplines, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50 (1), 100–119. doi: [10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00193](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00193)
- McCulloch, G. (2017) Education: an applied multidisciplinary field? The English experience. In G. Whitty and J. Furlong (Eds) *Knowledge and the Study of Education: An International Exploration* (Oxford, Symposium Books), 211–230.
- McIntyre, J., Youens, B., and Stevenson, H. (2019) Silenced voices: the disappearance of the university and the student teacher in teacher education policy discourse in England, *Research Papers in Education*, 34 (2), 153–168. doi: [10.1080/02671522.2017.1402084](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2017.1402084).
- Morris, R., Perry, T., Smith, E., and Pilgrim-Brown, J. (2023) *Education: The State of the Discipline. Survey of Education Researchers: A Survey of Education researchers’ Work, Experiences and Identities* (London, British Educational Research Association).
- Peterson, A. and Bryan, H. (2023) Editorial: educational studies today and for the future: threats, hopes and collaborations, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 71 (5), 473–476. doi: [10.1080/00071005.2023.2261736](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2261736).
- Peterson, J. B. (2018) *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto, Random House Canada).
- Power, S. (2023) Confronting the ‘coming crisis’ in education research, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 71 (5), 477–491. doi: [10.1080/00071005.2023.2221720](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2221720).
- Reid, W. A. (1984) Curriculum, community, and liberal education: a response to the practical 4, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 14 (1), 103–111. doi: [10.1080/03626784.1984.11075910](https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1984.11075910).
- Richardson, W. (2002) Educational studies in the United Kingdom, 1940–2002, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50 (1), 3–56. doi: [10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00190](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00190).
- Schleiermacher, F. D. (1826/1983) *Ausgewählte Pädagogische Schriften. Besorgt von Ernst Lichtenstein* (Paderborn, Schöningh).

- Schwab, J. J. (1971) The practical 2: arts of eclectic, *The School Review*, 79 (4), 493–542. doi: [10.1086/442998](https://doi.org/10.1086/442998).
- Schwab, J. J. (1973) The practical 3: translation into curriculum, *The School Review*, 81 (4), 501–522. doi: [10.1086/443100](https://doi.org/10.1086/443100).
- Schwab, J. J. (1983) The practical 4: something for curriculum professors to do, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 13 (3), 239–265. doi: [10.1080/03626784.1983.11075885](https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1983.11075885).
- Schwab, J. J. (2013) The practical: a language for curriculum, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45 (5), 591–621. (Original work published in 1970). doi: [10.1080/00220272.2013.809152](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2013.809152).
- Simon, B. (1981) Why no pedagogy in England? In B. Simon and W. Taylor (Eds) *Education in the Eighties: The Central Issue* (London, Batsford), 124–145.
- Simon, B. (1991) *Education and the Social Order 1940–1990* (London, Lawrence & Wishart).
- Terhart, E. (2012) Drifting didactics, *Jahrbuch für Allgemeine Didaktik*, 2, 65–76.
- Terhart, E. (2017) Interdisciplinary research on education and its disciplines: processes of change and lines of conflict in unstable academic expert cultures: Germany as an example, *European Educational Research Journal*, 16 (6), 921–936. doi: [10.1177/1474904116681798](https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904116681798).
- Uljens, M. (2023) Non-affirmative theory of education: problems, positionings and possibilities. In M. Uljens (Ed.) *Non-Affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung* (Cham, Springer), 3–19.
- Uljens, M. and Ylimaki, R. M. (Eds) (2017) *Bridging Educational Leadership, Curriculum Theory and Didaktik* (Cham, Springer).
- Weniger, E. (2000) *Didaktik* as a theory of education. In I. Westbury, S. Hopmann, and K. Riquarts (Eds) *Teaching as a Reflective Practice: The German Didaktik Tradition* (Mahwah, Erlbaum), 111–125.
- Westbury, I. (2005) Reconsidering Schwab's 'practicals': a response to Peter Hlebowitsh's 'generational ideas in curriculum: a historical triangulation, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 35 (1), 89–101. doi: [10.1111/j.1467-873X.2005.00317.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2005.00317.x).
- Westbury, I. (2013) Reading Schwab's the 'practical' as an invitation to a curriculum enquiry, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45 (5), 640–651. doi: [10.1080/00220272.2013.795246](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2013.795246).
- Ye, L. (1999) Return the initiative of individual spiritual development to students [in Chinese]. In K. Hao (Ed) *Facing the 21st century: My views on education* (Guangdong Education Press), 331–340.
- Ye, L. (2009a) "New Basic Education" and me, *Frontiers of Education in China*, 4 (4), 558–609. doi: [10.1007/s11516-009-0031-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11516-009-0031-0)
- Ye, L. (2009b) *Research on Basic Educational Reform and the Reconstruction of Chinese Pedagogic Theory [in Chinese]* (Beijing, Economic Science Press).
- Ye, L. (2015) *Return and Breakthrough: The Outline of Life-Practice Pedagogics [in Chinese]* (Shanghai, East China Normal University Press).

Correspondence

Zongyi Deng

IOE - Faculty of Education and Society,

University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, UK

Email: zongyi.deng@ucl.ac.uk