Philosophy of Education: An Overview of Contemporary Foreign Literature

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Abstract. The article gives an overview of foreign research on the key topics in contemporary philosophy of education. The first two sections are devoted to discussing epistemic, moral and political objectives of education. The last section discusses one of the most controversial topics of contemporary philosophy of education—the professional status of teachers. Ability to comprehend critically social and political conditions of formation and spread of knowledge appears to be one of the essential epistemic objectives of education. Attention towards implicit fundamentals of expert knowledge and ability to find relevant information to verify beliefs are epistemic virtues contributing to formation of an autonomous cognizing individual. Among ethical objectives of education, we have traditionally singled out personal autonomy, ability to live a full social and economic life, comprehensive personal development, civic (democratic) competencies, and cooperation skills. The last twenty years, largely due to feminist and communitarian criticism, have witnessed development of an attitude that consists in finding the paramount goal of education in inculcating the ideals of love, care and community spirit, instead of autonomy of a rational individual. Implicitly ethical objectives of education are closely related to "distributive" objectives that define the final provider of teaching efforts. Having analyzed discussions on professionalization of teachers' activities, we conclude that, although teaching is characterized by some prominent features of professional activity, its specific nature makes it difficult to establish distinct criteria of professionalization.

Keywords: philosophy of education, epistemic objectives of education, moral and political objectives of education, professional status of teachers.

Most generally, philosophy of education[1] is defined, similarly to philosophy of law or philosophy of religion, as an area of philosophical knowledge which studies general issues of the nature, objectives and principles of education [Siegel, 2009. P. 3; Blake et al., 2008.

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[1] Philosophy of education was born as an academic discipline in the first third of the 20th century, after publication of John Dewey's classical *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916). Since then, philosophy of education has become a fundamental discipline of education studies and an indispensable element in teacher training.

P. 2; Bailey et al., 2010. P. 18]. Traditionally, such perspective implies appealing to the major, fundamental philosophical tradition (from Socrates and Plato, through Augustine, Descartes, Hume, Rousseau and Kant, to Dewey and philosophers of contemporary trends like post-structuralism, constructivism, feminism, etc.) and constructing a historically oriented canon with educational problematics focused around schools of philosophy or their individual representatives.

Thus, issues of educational institution autonomy may be addressed through interpretation of Plato's *The Republic*; the concept of learner-centered education may be studied through the example of Rousseau's *Émile*; and principles of developing a learning program may be explored through the prism of oeuvres written by critical theorists who use various interpretations of Marxism to analyze institutes of power and control in education (see, for instance, classical works [Freire, 1970; 1998; Giroux, 1981; 1988]). Similar structures can be found, for example, in the extremely popular Nodding's *Philosophy of Education* [Noddings, 2007], which has been republished four times so far, or in the classical introduction to philosophical problematics of education under the editorship of Blake [Blake et al., 2008] .

This principle can be largely proven by traditions. Thus, Gert Biesta, editor-in-chief of *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, one of the oldest academic journals in this field, argues that ignoring the common historical and philosophical context, especially that of the previous research in philosophy of education, inevitably results in reinventing the wheel [Biesta, 2009. P. 3] .

Another traditional way of defining this disciplinary field consists in including education-related issues in a broader philosophical context of epistemic, ethical and socio-political studies.

Epistemic problems may be related to the issues of curriculum development, such as: what should be stressed in the study of natural sciences—learning the most relevant theories or mastering research procedures? What are the role and place of general humanities in curricula, including those of natural science faculties? What criteria should be used to develop curricula? How much should be the rate of curriculum flexibility?

Questions related to learning and teaching processes are asked in the context of epistemic, ethical and conscience analysis studies: Is it possible to teach analytical thinking without indoctrination, i. e. without noncritical acceptance and adoption of original beliefs the very method of object investigation is built on? When are changes to students' most deep-rooted beliefs acceptable or desirable? Is it possible and, in some cases, desirable to teach students generally accepted scientific theories even if the latter contradict beliefs typical of their community culture, as when the theory of evolution is taught to students raised in Abrahamic traditions, for instance? What teaching practices can be considered unacceptable and why (like, for example, is it ethical to perform anatomy experiments at school)?

Issues of school education are also investigated with regard to ethical problems and those related to the social nature of cognition: how exactly is school education supposed to bring up future citizens of Russia—focusing on personal development or on proving viewpoints false or true? In other words, should education consist in communicating a set of ethical principles accepted in a specific society or in developing the ability to make well-grounded, independent judgments on the nature of moral constraints? Should schools function as democratic communities? That is, researchers are trying to answer the following questions: Who and to what extent is responsible for curricula? Which methods of teaching are acceptable? To what extent are parents and students allowed to participate in developing the educational policy? Is refusal from certain conceptions of the good (like the utilitarian one, suggesting that moral value of a deed depends directly on its practicability) justified when building the content of school education?

The fundamental compendiums under the editorship of Bailey [Bailey et al., 2010] and Siegel [Siegel, 2009] may serve as examples of the second method of defining the disciplinary field of philosophy of education.

Besides, many of the key education issues have always been a point of purely philosophical interest. What is the fundamental goal of education—development of true beliefs, or development of well-reasoned beliefs, or development of understanding, or a combination of all the three (read in more details below)? In what sense can content of any educational program be called unbiased? Is it possible to avoid indoctrination, and how destructive can its effects be? Should education be aimed at sharing the existing knowledge or rather at encouraging students to conduct their own research and become intelligently independent?

Finally, some common philosophical points (on the nature of truth and true beliefs, rationality and objectivity) may be made clear through the context of education.

However, these methods of defining a disciplinary field bring forth a number of problems. First, how relevant are the results of historical theoretical studies in philosophy of education with empirical education studies (sociological, cognitivist, psychological, etc.)? As Biesta notes, if philosophy of education insists on being primarily focused on philosophy rather than education, researchers in education from other fields may call into question importance and relevance of such studies [Biesta, 2009. P. 2] .

Second, can we actually talk about independence of philosophy of education as a discipline? Since philosophy of education is a borderline area of research at faculties of philosophy, and courses are mainly delivered within the frame of practical education programs, there is also an institutional aspect to this question [Mayo, 2011. P. 472] .

Changes to the practices of teaching philosophy of education, as well as the growing number of sociologically oriented studies in education have provoked ample discussion on methods, tools, "style" and prospects of research in philosophy of education (see, for instance, [Alexander, 2006; Suissa, 2008; Chambliss, 2009; Biesta, 2011; Hayden, 2012]) .

Despite the diversity of approaches applied in these discussions, there is a comparatively strong agreement on the major objectives of philosophy of education, which is to shed light on the concept of the very term "education" and the related notions of "learning" and "knowledge", on epistemic, ethical and political ideas of education, on the nature of ideals in education, on the role of the state and teachers, and on the rights of students and their parents.

Quite naturally, definition of "education" depends largely on which school of philosophy an author is more inclined to[2], however some basic aspects are characteristic of any philosophical theorizing on education.

First, the process of education is most often associated with acquiring various types of knowledge and, broader, with ability for rational thinking, i. e. for applying correctly the key notions, principles and methods of investigation that are learned through the study of natural and social sciences, literature, history, mathematics, arts and languages. Ability for "rational life management", as John Dewey would call it, manifests itself through understanding and critically assessing socio-political, economic and moral conditions of the surrounding reality.

Second, intelligence sophistication developed as a result of learning is insufficient in itself; what is also required is practical competence, the know-how of applying theoretical knowledge creatively in real-life situations.

Third, education also includes nurturing the "spirit of community", solidarity with fellow citizens, and broader with any other people, in what concerns needs, goals of action, and moral orientations.

Fourth, education implies inculcating a specific responsibility with regard to life and results of one's own deeds. Otherwise speaking, this is about developing "moral sobriety" focused on the issues of social justice and the search for ideals, as well as developing the need and ability for self-reflection aimed at analyzing one's individual destination and ways of achieving it.

There is no doubt the aspects of education described above are rather generalized and thus raise a lot of questions about the nature of rational thinking and creative skills, the essence of general moral orientations, learner's autonomy, and methods of upbringing. Going

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[2] See, for instance, discussion on "neutral" definition by J. Wilson [Wilson, 2003; Smeyers, Depaepe, 2009. P. 217–225; Lees, 2011] or discussion of metaphors in defining the term "education" [Bailey et al., 2010. P. 58–60] .

into detail on these issues is possible if we address the key subjects in philosophy of education, namely the meaning of epistemic and moral objectives of education, to which the following two sections of this review are devoted. The last section discusses the professional status of teachers, one of the most controversial topics of contemporary philosophy of education.

Any formulation of epistemic objectives of education is based on the idea of the "ideal cognizing subject", a product of educational and upbringing process. That's why transfer of true knowledge is traditionally believed to be the main objective of education.

Epistemic objectives of education

However, the issue with epistemic objectives is not exclusively about determining specific areas of knowledge or content of curriculum; it is rather focused around the very notion of "knowledge" and explanation of the state of mind which corresponds to the verb "to know". When learning is discussed, knowledge is most often understood as information expressed in positive statements and stating some facts, i. e. the so-called propositional knowledge. Every propositional knowledge doesn't represents justified truth; and, since the process of thinking should obviously lead to construction of true opinions, the process of proving and justifying statements is becoming the central epistemic objective of the process of education [Adler, 2003. P. 286] .

There are several problems associated with the notions of truth and proof which affect formulations of epistemic objectives of education.

For example, Rorty [Rorty, 1998] specifies that there is virtually no difference between the truth and the process of proving, i. e. truth and justified opinion are equally effective from the viewpoint of feasibility, so developing a well-founded, rational judgment instead of a true one may serve a relevant epistemic objective. However, problems of different quality appear when we discard the point of trueness of a judgment and focus on the process of proving in defining the objectives of education. What should be considered a sufficient ground for proving? How to avoid epistemic dependence (i. e. culturally and socially induced bias) and indoctrination in the process of proving?

One of the perspectives (the so-called internalist perspective) on the nature of proving holds that proving depends on either the original fundamental beliefs, which don't require any other procedures to be proved, or the internal coherence of beliefs. The opponent, externalist perspective suggests that proving, at least in some part, depends on factors external to an individual's mind. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether an individual is aware or not that the process they are engaged in is a process of truth attainment, i. e. the original cognizing subject's beliefs do not affect availability and fullness of truth.

In terms of education, the internalist theory looks more attractive: the teacher's objective is not simply to transfer knowledge, but to create conditions in which students would learn to decide themselves what to believe. An individual taught to prove is more likely to develop true beliefs than someone who is used to *guess* correct answers: "Knowledge is not just hitting the target, but hitting it using advanced and appropriate methods' [Sosa, 2003; P. 105] .

The idea that teaching to prove should be regarded as the central epistemic objective of education is also supported by relativist criticism of the concept of objective and universal truth, which consists in arguing that truth depends on institutional framework or research perspective [Phillips, 2007]. In the roughest sense, relativism suggests that: 1) a proposition may be true in one research pattern and false in another; 2) there are no self-sufficient criteria of preferring this or that research objective.

Nevertheless, the relativist point, however rough the wording, cannot prevent asserting the truth as an epistemic objective: once the context of a study has been determined, one cannot recognize every judgment as true. Neither can one make every proposition true by simply finding a perfect frame for it, as there are propositions devoid of probability from any research perspective. Besides, if one actually believes in equal value of all propositions, the process of learning will become useless as such.

Finally, the last objection to true propositional affirmations as an epistemic objective is that process of learning is not restricted to receiving isolated fragments of knowledge. The latter should be organized in structures to help learners feel confident in any context and to build an opportunity for further learning.

That means, the paramount objective of both education and research should be development of understanding, which provides a comprehensive perspective on a field of knowledge and reveals relationship between its individual components [Elgin, 2007]. Unlike propositional knowledge, understanding doesn't exist in a rigid binary opposition of false and true. Instead, there are degrees of adequate perception of reality: a student's understanding of human anatomy may be true, but essentially different in its depth and reach from that of a professor of medicine at a university.

Among cognitive skills, development of which is believed to be one of the major epistemic objectives, the closest relationship with understanding is demonstrated by the specific type of "know-how", namely the know-how to assess propositional knowledge. This type of knowledge helps an individual develop their own critical opinion; and ability for critical judgment is what differentiates an expert from a novice [Siegel, 2003; Dreyfus, 2006]. Similar to understanding, know-how may be mastered at different levels.

Know-how implies developing the ability to identify and criticize beliefs that are rooted most deeply in cognitive and cultural practic-

es, being thus the most inconspicuous. The question about which educational practices are the most efficient in promoting development of such skills, is still open. The only thing that is for sure is that skills described above are not typified, algorithmic, or routinized. Applying know-how often requires specific situational knowledge and skills.

Yet, some scientists [Sosa, 2003] believe that know-how may be a form of propositional knowledge, at least in some of the aspects. If we define know-how as "knowledge about the way of doing or creating something", it may be opposed by ignorance of how something has to be done. Say, one may know how the process of doing a sport trick looks like, and this knowledge is different from knowing how to perform the trick. Sosa calls the former type of knowledge as "viewer's knowledge" and the latter as "agent's knowledge". However, both types differ from the capability of actually performing the trick.

Both know-how and propositional knowledge should be applied correctly in appropriate situations, so an accompanying epistemic objective of education is to inculcate epistemic virtues: aptitude for searching good reasons for a judgment, openness of mind to criticism and opponents' opinions, modesty, self-reflection, love of the truth, and respect towards arguments built in accordance with accepted rules [Sherman, White, 2003] .

The issue of developing epistemic virtues is being disputed. Some researchers [Sosa, 2007] believe that cognitive virtues should necessarily include competence in a specific area of knowledge, while others [Riggs, 2003] argue that having appropriate motivation is enough: if a student demonstrates such epistemic virtue as craving to find the truth but has little success in learning performance yet, they still need to be encouraged.

Development of the epistemic virtues listed above requires considerable intelligent autonomy, as the learner is not only a consumer of expert knowledge, but also a new member of cognitive knowledge-generating communities. However, here we face a question: To what extent should the cognizing subject be autonomous? Should they be able to determine validity of propositions themselves?

On the one part, the problem consists in the socio-institutional element of knowledge creation and transfer: culture, ethnicity, gender and social status may notably affect construction of expert knowledge. The latter can reflect interests of mainstream groups intending to present some research perspectives as universal norms, while stigmatizing nonconventional approaches as deviation [Goldman, 2002]. Conversely, the so-called epistemic injustice is that a person is trusted less for reasons associated with their social identity [Fricker, 2007] .

On the other part, the cognizing subject, as a member of a cognitive community, is dependable on information provided by other members: diversity of knowledge in contemporary communities

leaves little choice but to trust expert opinions—rational behavior sometimes consists in swallowing others' opinions [Hardwig, 2006] .

Thus, ability to comprehend critically socio-political conditions of knowledge creation and distribution is one the most important epistemic objectives of education.

To overcome epistemic dependence, we need to answer the following questions: What are requirements for counting a belief proved (especially if talking about collective sources of knowledge creation and distribution)? Can a collective belief be regarded as knowledge before an individual makes sure it's true?

Since the whole of knowledge required to exist in a contemporary society is incomparable with individual ability for understanding, rational behavior will be to search for additional proving sources. This way, beliefs may be confirmed through such form of evidence as non-contradiction of information obtained from different sources [Adler, 2002] .

So, the main objective is to monitor the very possibility of trusting the information received from outside. In everyday life, sources of information don't need to be tested regularly for reliability: we just believe what other people say if there are no obvious signs of lying. When it comes to expert opinions, however, at least two reliability criteria should be satisfied: competence in a specific field, and honesty. Nevertheless, teaching practices also suggest teaching the art of suspicion: learners must be ready to denounce some propositions even if originally the source of information was supposed to be trusted. Attention towards implicit fundamentals of expert knowledge and skills of searching for verifying information undoubtedly belong to the epistemic virtues promoting development of an autonomous cognizing subject.

Ethical and political objectives of education

Ethical and political objectives of education are traditionally divided (see, for instance, [Peters, 1966; Carr, 2003. P. 166–245]) into three types: 1) inherently ethnical objectives of education, i. e. the ideal for an educated person to strive for, and values that form the basis of this ideal; 2) "distributive objectives", which describe what exactly the process of education should be like; and 3) objectives defining possible restraints in the educational process.

Inherently ethical objectives of education traditionally include: personal autonomy, ability to live a full social and economic life, comprehensive personal development, civic (democratic) competencies, and cooperation skills. However, the last 20 years have witnessed evolvement of the idea to replace rational subject autonomy with ideals of caring, love, and the spirit of community as the main goal of education [Noddings, 2001a; Cuypers, 2004], largely due to feminist and communitarian criticism. Nevertheless, the conception of per-

sonal autonomy remains crucial when we talk about liberal education [Bailey et al., 2010. P. 333] .

Personal autonomy implies the right to be well-informed about one's life prospects, to be capable of having one's own opinion and to act in compliance with one's own perspectives. Such autonomy requires not only knowledge about the outside world, but also ability for self-reflection and strength of will that make possible the choice of a well-reasoned life strategy [Callan, 1997; Kerr, 2006] .

Personal autonomy also has a socio-economic aspect: learning should serve, inter alia, the purpose of developing economic stability and the spirit of community.

Any argumentation on education and development of an autonomous personality is rested upon the idea that educational institutions are designed to provide future prosperity of students. Such prosperity is manifested through, first of all, the ability to choose occupation to fit one's personality, the desire to master professional skills at the highest level, the aptitude for building emotional affinity and social relationships, the interest towards other (non-occupational) spheres of life, like culture, sports, arts, etc.

Development of civic competencies is at least as important objective of education as personal autonomy. A person should be aware of the historical genesis of political institutes, understand mechanisms of their operation, use this knowledge to promote their own personal and community interests and to understand legitimate interests of other community members, and realize the limits and the side effects of political institutes' activities.

The interest towards democratic education in philosophy of education has been rising throughout the last two decades. This is the result of political processes in Eastern Europe, increased apathy and poor political involvement of citizens in developed countries, as well as evolution of integration processes in Europe [Kymlicka, Norman, 1994; Frazer, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Banks, 2008; Hahn, 2010; Quaynor, 2012] .

There are quite a number of variations in definition of notions "citizenship" and "civic education", as well as in the methods of implementing such education. Yet, we can single out some dichotomies that form the framework of discussion.

Citizenship as such can be regarded as a normative ideal (something that is earned) or as a status shared by all community members, which raises the issue of indoctrination through inculcating political values in the process of democratic education [Fernández, Sundström, 2011; 2013] .

The next key dichotomy differentiates between the minimum and maximum scope of civil rights. The minimum usually covers various freedoms, like those of speech or political choice, etc. The maximum also includes welfare rights, like the right to education, the right to an adequate standard of living, etc. Questions that are raised by differ-

entiating between these two concern first of all the content of democratic education: for example, how do we inculcate the idea of citizenship to someone whose community is in cultural conflict with the prevailing political values?

Finally, the very definition of citizenship as a shared status entails ambiguous interpretation: a citizen may have an either passive or active attitude towards civil rights and obligations. In practice, the choice of interpretation affects the content of educational programs which answer the question about to what extent democratic education should inculcate democratic virtues, such as desire to take active participation in the life of society.

Despite the dichotomies mentioned above, there is a consensus on objectives of democratic education and methods of its achievement, which are as follows: 1) to realize critically democratic principles and values, as well as skills that need to be developed to provide full participation in democratic procedures; 2) to inculcate civic virtues, such as sense of justice, tolerance to other people's opinions, decency, spirit of community, etc. [Carr, 2003. P. 178–181]. Besides, as many citizens receive school education, it appears reasonable to use this stage to introduce subjects associated with inculcation of civic virtues [Hanh, 2010] .

Inherently ethical objectives of education are closely related to "distributive" objectives which determine the end user of educational efforts. The conventional point of view suggests that everyone has equal right to good education: neither socio-economic factors nor specifics of development should affect accessibility of educational resources.

Such educational egalitarianism implies fulfillment of the meritocratic requirement, which holds that unequal end results may be justified by the combination of a person's talents and applied efforts but should never proceed from unequal initial opportunities [Brighouse, Swift, 2008]. Opponents of the egalitarian approach to education argue that, since talents are not derived from personal efforts, any inborn qualities should not provide any advantage in learning, similar to social status. Besides, egalitarianism in education may contradict other democratic values, like the priority right of parents to determine the process of education for their children. Finally, the egalitarian principle, which requires equality of educational institutes and reduces competition among private and public educational organizations, may exert negative effects on the education system as a whole.

These objections can probably be answered by the following interpretation of the egalitarian principle: education should be distributed to enhance as much as possible opportunities for those in the least favorable situations [Brighouse, Swift, 2006] .

Another possible answer could consist in replacing the principle of ensuring equal rights to education or supporting the least advantaged with the principle of inherent value of education as such: the

best educational resources should be provided to those who can use them the most efficiently [Wilson, 1991]. The main problem of this principle consists in hardly identifiable criteria for efficient use of education and in impossibility of differentiating between providing educational resources and providing other socio-economic resources.

Speaking about ethical and political objectives of education, we cannot but mention the three most powerful programs that outline the content of moral education (detailed description is beyond the scope of this article): 1) ethics of virtue, or communitarianism, which sees the goal of education in inculcating a number of virtues to an individual [Carr, Steutel, 1999][3]; 2) various versions of Kantian and Rawlsian rationalism[4] and liberalism, which see the end goal of moral education in developing specific moral judgment skills and the basic principles of solving various moral dilemmas [Kohlberg, Levine, Hewer, 1983]; 3) ethics of caring, which sees the main goal of moral education in enhancing reflective and emotional understanding of effects that one's deeds have on other people's lives, and a deep understanding of justified ways of living one's own life [Noddings, 2001a] .

Professional status of teacl

The issue of professionalization of teaching is one of those that have always aroused interest in philosophy of education. Today, discussions on the teaching profession touch upon such phenomena as informal educational systems, competency-oriented education, and lifelong learning.

These discussions focus on external criteria of professionalism assessment, like status, salary, specialization and instruments of control, rather than on internal ones [Noddings, 2001b; Ingersoll, Perda, 2008] .

Traditionally, an occupation is called a profession if it has the following features:

- professional competencies based on profound theoretical knowledge;
- education and training in those competencies certified by examination;
- a code of professional conduct oriented towards the "public good';
- a powerful professional organization [Millerson, 1964. P. 14] .

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[3] Among Russian publications on this issue, the following one appears the most remarkable: [Kurennoy, 2008] .

[4] John Rawls (1921–2002), one of the leading American political philosophers who used Kant's social contract theory as a foundation of moral philosophy. For more details, see: http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/52/02.pdf

The criteria listed above turn out to be insufficient to determine teaching professionalization, as they do not take into account the diversity of all possible teaching practices.

Thus, the first feature, professional competencies, needs to be defined more precisely: the teaching profession obviously requires not only knowledge in the subject field but also teaching competencies, which raises questions on the content of required teaching knowledge.

Planning of study load, use of educational technologies, issues of professional ethics and effective teaching to children with special needs are the integral components of teacher education. However, many approaches in this field are rather metaphorical than academic in their nature. For instance, the popular modern teaching conceptions based on the theory of multiple intelligences or cognitive brain research have no proof of their instrumental and practical applicability [Reagan, 2010. P. 216] .

Another problem arising from teaching competencies and growing more relevant with emergence of alternative education systems (home-based education, distance education, Montessori education, Waldorf education, etc.) concerns assessment and certification of teacher qualification. The existing methods of teacher certification only guarantee knowledge of the teaching theory, but not ability for efficient teaching practices in specific learning environments.

Therefore, additional criteria for professionalization of teaching should include: a) an extensive teacher internship during the studies in order to master the "unseen knowledge" [John, 2008. P. 19]; b) proper community instruments to control accessibility of the profession [Reagan, 2010. P. 217] .

The latter is closely related to the issues of professional career and criteria for professional autonomy, especially in terms of developing the content of curricula and assessing teacher performance. Education reforms of the recent decades, based on the idea of economic viability, transfer the focus of bureaucratic control from medium level to micro-level, replacing assessment of academic performance with monitoring of teaching skills and competencies. Besides, teaching autonomy is also limited by the client-oriented model of education based on engaging parents in assessment of the educational process [Woods, 2002] .

To summarize, we can say that, despite having the basic features of profession, teaching is so specific that it is hard to identify precise criteria of professionalization. The latter may be clarified with the help of further philosophical research on epistemic and moral aspects of the process of education.

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