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Philosophy of Education as Clinical and Critical Action

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore a future possibility for the philosophy of education, drawing upon the achievements of existing educational sciences, including the philosophy of education, and using the history and research trends of the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan as a case study. In Japan, philosophers of education have created and refined concepts and frameworks of thought for students, teachers, and researchers of various other educational sciences to re-examine education in ways previously unexplored, thereby enriching present and future education and educational sciences as components of modern enlightenment projects. However, the current philosophy of education, as evidenced by the current research trends seen in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy of Education* edited by the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan and published in July 2023, tends to be confined within the bounds of Western modernity. From a postmodern and postcolonial perspective, it is necessary to cautiously acknowledge that the actions and practices of contemporary philosophy of education in Japan are somewhat lacking in terms of self-reflection and self-critique. Consequently, this paper highlights the potential of a clinical philosophy of education, building upon the comprehensive self-reflection practices found in cultural anthropology.

Key words: Thorough (self-) reflection, (Cultural) Anthropology, Clinical philosophy of education, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy of Education,* (Avoiding) the modern enlightenment hubris

Achievements of Educational Sciences in the Modern Age

Our world teems with myriad activities involving countless individuals, numerous non-human organisms, and inanimate objects. Thus, the world is in a perpetual state of flux that is both unpredictable and beyond our control; as a result, the world may become incongruous with our understanding, or we may find ourselves disconnected and alienated from it. Consequently, institutionalised habits and customs that ought to guide

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us through life may no longer be dependable and robust.[1] As we navigate through the passivity imposed by our constant involvement in the vicissitudes of the world we cannot wholly comprehend or even be conscious of, we are compelled to initiate our own actions and practices, including inaction, despite lacking a comprehensive understanding of the world.

The logos of the enlightenment (Aufklärung/lumières) have endeavoured to transform the inherent passivity and struggle of human existence into activeness as a subject. The educational sciences generate and accumulate knowledge, techniques, and technologies that enable individuals' participation in education as a modern Western enlightenment project.

Achievements of the Philosophy of Education

A shift from passivity to activeness has assisted educators, students, and educational researchers in avoiding nihilism, providing hope and motivation for the actions and practices within education and educational sciences. Nevertheless, this shift might entice individuals into the 'hubris' trap, wherein they seek to control what lies beyond the realm of human knowledge and capability, which ought to be considered sacrosanct even if technically accessible. Consequently, the aspiration for actions and practices is subconsciously supplanted by an expectation that one's desires can, or indeed must, be fulfilled in the future, and the impetus for actions and practices is replaced by an urge to achieve predetermined objectives.

Although we cannot entirely extricate ourselves from this system of 'expectation' and 'urge' for the future—given our perpetual involvement in education and educational sciences as part of the modern enlightenment project—we ought to initiate actions and practices as free agents to sidestep the 'hubris' pitfall of the modern enlightenment projects. I argue that the philosophy of education generates and refines concepts and theoretical frameworks, enabling those engaged in education and educational sciences to (re)consider, conceive, and discuss ideas anew, thereby averting the 'hubris' trap.

The *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy of Education*[2], edited by the Philosophy of

[1] Such instances are abundant, ranging from mundane issues, such as our understanding of ourselves and others and the interpersonal relationships, to global matters, such as generative artificial intelligence, pandemics, and climate change.

[2] The Philosophy of Education Society of Japan, ed. (2023), *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy of Education*, Tokyo, Maruzen Publishing.

Education Society of Japan, published in July 2023 (hereinafter referred to as the *Encyclopaedia*) encompasses numerous entries and phrases elucidating how the philosophy of education clarifies and critiques the principles underpinning the actions and practices of conventional modern education and educational sciences. Furthermore, it depicts how the philosophy of education has endeavoured to introduce alternative concepts and theoretical frameworks for considering, conceiving, and discussing actions and practices of education and educational sciences in a manner distinct from the past. In essence, the philosophy of education aims to challenge and generate difference—'différance' in the terminology of J. Derrida—, and to incorporate this into the actual actions and practices of education and educational sciences, where conventional principles persist irrespective of their efficacy.

Furthermore, the *Encyclopaedia* elucidates how the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan has critically revised and updated its 'political positionality', enhancing the depth and precision of reflection on the principles that function both overtly and covertly within the Society's discussions and research. According to Takuo Nishimura (the *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 568–571), upon the Society's establishment in 1957, politics were viewed as an external obstacle to education. This notion, accepted as a self-evident truth, dictated that researchers in the philosophy of education should lead educators and researchers in other fields of educational sciences by offering 'universal and objective' guidelines rooted in the 'genuine' logic of education in its ideal state, whilst distancing themselves from 'external political' influences on education and from other sectors of educational sciences engaged with politics.

However, the emergence of postmodernism and postcolonialism, which critiqued conventional Western and modern ideas—an approach widely adopted by Japanese educational philosophers in their studies—began to gain public recognition in Japan in the 1990s. These movements instigated a complete reversal in the political stance of Japanese educational philosophy. Educators, students, and researchers in the philosophy of education and other fields of educational sciences are now perceived to be inherently engaged in modern Western enlightenment project initiatives. Consequently, political issues, such as the dynamics of power and the central-peripheral structures, are also regarded as inherently embedded within education and educational sciences, functioning both overtly and covertly, rather than as external elements. Following this postmodern and postcolonial realisation, Nishimura articulated that the raison d'être of educational philosophers in Japan could be discerned solely through the rigour of self-reflection on their narrative and construction of reality via language (the *Encyclopaedia*, p. 570). This insight, along with the influence of the linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences

at large, became a 'common understanding' within the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan.

How can one reasonably reflect on the validity and thoroughness of one's reflections? In other words, how can one inquire about the political operation and influence of one's positionality that guides their reflections? If the philosophy of education is an academic discipline pursued by human beings capable of committing the 'banality of evil' (H. Arendt), and the raison d'être of educational philosophers lies in valid and thorough reflections on their narrations and constructions of the reality of education and educational sciences, then the fundamental responsibility of educational philosophers should be to maintain the self-awareness and self-reflection regarding their linguistic actions and practices, and the mechanisms that motivate them. This is particularly imperative for any researcher who has lived after and through the historical experience of the modern barbarism of reason and enlightenment.

Achievements of Cultural Anthropology

The subsequent section investigates the mechanisms that facilitate the actions and practices of reflection within the philosophy of education, taking Japan as a case study. However, initially, this section delves into the mechanisms of the actions and practices of reflection in cultural anthropology. The philosophy of education shares two significant points with cultural anthropology.[3] The first is the politics of their origins, established and evolved as disciplines for assimilating, dominating, and controlling 'savages' or children to convert them into 'human beings' fashioned after Western adults. The second is the gradual revision and enhancement of the initial politics by researchers, particularly the operations of power within the centre-periphery structure of academic perspectives, through rigorous self-reflection on their research approach amidst the critique of post-20th-century modernity and the West.[4]

Cultural anthropology has been significantly influenced by the linguistic turn,

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[3] Yujiro Nakamura (1984), 'Kodomo: Shinso-teki Nin'gen, Chi'isai Otona, to Ibunka' (Children: Deep Level of Human Beings, Little Adults, and Different Cultures), Yujiro Nakamura, *Jutsugo-syu: Kininaru Kotoba* (*Glossary: Words of Interest*), Tokyo, Iwanami Shinsho, pp. 76-80 [in Japanese].

[4] Okabe (2021) discusses the process of reflection on academic perspectives in cultural anthropology and primatology (ecological anthropology). Mika Okabe (2021), 'Mou wo Hiraku Pathos, Mou ni Hiraku Pathos' (Pathos to Enlighten the Ignorant, and Pathos for Opening to the *Ignorant*), Mika Okabe and Fumio Ono, eds., *Kyouikugaku no Pathos-ron-teki Tenkai* (*The Pathological Turn in Education*), Tokyo, University of Tokyo Press, pp. 218-224 [in Japanese].

resulting in the development of notable theories, such as the structuralist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss and the interpretive anthropology of Geertz. In recent years, a number of radical reflective theories have critiqued anthropocentrism and logocentrism, entrenched in human thought and behaviour. These include Latour's actor-network theory and the theories of ontological anthropology by Strathern and Cohn. These theories have exerted a wide influence across the humanities and social sciences, beyond cultural anthropology alone.

This profound reflection in cultural anthropology is facilitated not only by the deep educational and cultural experiences of individual researchers in the humanities and social sciences but also by the academic methodologies employed by researchers conducting fieldwork in cultures that are extraordinary to them and that help define them as a 'minority'. During fieldwork, cultural anthropologists reside alone or in small groups among the local people in diverse cultures for extended periods, such as one or two years, undertaking participant observations and interviews in the local language. 'Minority' in this context refers to individuals regardless of their number, whose thoughts, words, and actions are likely to be perceived as 'strange', 'exceptional', or 'abnormal', despite being natural and self-evident to themselves, leading them to adopt a position of articulating 'excuses' for their 'unique' thoughts and actions to those in the majority. Cultural anthropologists introduce a 'strong parallax' into their own thoughts and actions, acquired over time in their native region, by living long-term in other distinct cultures and experiencing the positionality of 'minority'. Cultural anthropologists strive to become more receptive to opportunities to challenge the creation of differences and incorporate them into their familiar, often Western and/or modern thoughts and actions. Moreover, they seize opportunities to regard their own thoughts and actions as 'strange', 'exceptional', and 'abnormal' and to scrutinise their positionality as the 'majority', which they have considered 'standard', 'typical', and 'normal'. Thus, cultural anthropologists aim to avoid adopting a stable position as part of the 'majority' with a safe and secure attitude. Instead, they aspire to assume a 'minority' stance, questioning the self-evidence and certainty of their thoughts and actions. This position enables them to thoroughly reflect on their actions and practices when engaging with other cultures and facing incommensurable situations. Furthermore, conducting interviews in the local language, with translations that do not rely on the stable foundation of their mother tongue, empowers cultural anthropologists to become acutely self-aware and reflective on their 'minority' premise.

Consequently, we are led to pose the following fundamental question: do Japanese educational philosophers have the same mechanism for profound self-reflection as

cultural anthropologists?

Challenges revealed by the *Encyclopaedia*

The methodologies employed in the philosophy of education can broadly be categorised into philosophical and intellectual-historical approaches. Philosophers of education refine their methodologies through the critique of other people's thoughts.

In the *Encyclopaedia*, entries on ancient and medieval thought (both Eastern and Western) include few members from the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan. Furthermore, the majority of entries in the *Encyclopaedia* focus on Japan and the West. In the discipline of philosophy and cultural anthropology, theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism, which deeply reflect on modern and Western thoughts, are often developed through the critical study of ancient and/or medieval thought and fieldwork in 'peripheral' regions of the world—such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the islands of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. In contrast, the philosophy of education in Japan, heavily influenced by Western and modern thought, finds the range of texts for study that provide clues for researchers to actively distance themselves from thoughts and behaviours deemed self-evidently 'standard' or 'normal' to be limited, both in terms of periods and regions, despite such clues being crucial for the proper and thorough conduct of reflective actions and practices.

Research in the philosophy of education in Japan has undeniably focused on modern criticism, particularly since the 1990s, but only within a Westernised and modernised context. The geopolitical position of Japan as the 'East' or 'Far East' country, which may have served to avoid the pitfalls of colonialism and orientalism in the past, requires careful reflection among contemporary philosophers of education in Japan. Most modern philosophers of education inhabit a world that favours global standardisation and predominantly engage with Western modern thought rather than Japanese classical thought.

However, even within the contexts of modernity and the West, many researchers have reflected—due to their 'minority' positions—on their political positionality and championed postmodern and postcolonial ideas that challenge conventional academia. The crux is that the intensity and accuracy of researchers' self-reflections must be preserved. Cultural anthropology underscores the necessity for researchers to create opportunities for encounters with diverse people and incommensurable situations as a 'minority.' I advocate that practising a clinical philosophy of education in public spheres

alongside diverse individuals can facilitate the creation of such opportunities for philosophers of education.

Philosophical educational research employing the methodologies of philosophy or intellectual history can indeed be clinical. These methodologies engage with the original linguistic situation and the original multifaceted contexts of concepts and theoretical frameworks through one's linguistic abilities and critical interpretation of texts from their own perspective and positionality. This clinical approach sheds light on historical problematic situations, linking them with the present. It might be considered to create a virtual reconstruction of past situations and contexts as another culture through linguistic and academic imaginative skills, as opposed to cultural anthropologists' direct and physical experience of these situations and contexts.

Researchers ought not to adopt concepts or theoretical frameworks from differing periods, regions, and contexts by unconsciously applying their own modes of thought, linguistic usage, or perspectives. Nonetheless, the current state of philosophy of education in Japan, as depicted in the *Encyclopaedia*, indicates numerous challenges in avoiding such appropriation.

Given this scenario, could adopting a 'minority' stance and engaging in discursive actions and practices in a pluralistic public sphere with others committed to different principles help maintain or enhance the intensity and precision of our reflective actions and practices? Indeed, such actions and practices have been explored through various means by several members of the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan. Could their insights and bricolage[5] abilities be recognised as public knowledge, benefitting not only the Society but also the global field of educational philosophy?

Japanese philosopher Megumi Sakabe posits that the actions and practices of clinical reflection should be 'philosophical practice'.[6] According to Sakabe, philosophical scholars should avoid placing themselves in a 'privileged' position, which is 'exceedingly inaccessible to non-specialists'. The language of philosophy extends from everyday natural language rather than being distinct from it. The engagement in clinical philosophy of education within the public realms of daily life, alongside individuals of diverse backgrounds, necessitates a return to this essential understanding of language use

[5] According to de Certeau, actions and practices of/as a 'minority' are an alternative type of creative activities, referred to as the poetics of everyday practice. They also differ from production activities and language production by the elite. The creative activity exercised in such contexts is called 'bricolage' and can secretly form another web of anti-discipline that cannot be controlled by the 'majority', such as the elite. (Michel de Certeau (1980), *ART DE FAIRE*, Paris, Union Générale d'Editions.)

[6] Megumi Sakabe (2007), *Sakabe Megumi Shu 4: 'Shirushi', 'Katari', 'Furumai'* (Collected Works of Megumi Sakabe 4: 'Symbols', 'Narratives', 'Practice'), Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, pp.359-368.

in philosophy and the pursuit of comprehensive and appropriate reflection.

Sakabe further suggests that 'the role of philosophy is to prepare dictionaries and grammar for ordinary people's thought'.[7]

Publishing the *Encyclopaedia* could be seen as fulfilling one of the roles of the philosophy of education. The *Encyclopaedia* ought not to serve as a means for readers to accumulate and flaunt knowledge to secure a privileged status and bolster existing theories within their own culture. Instead, it should enable them to seek, explore, and refine their use of language to initiate in-depth reflection on their actions and practices regarding education and educational research.

This positionality aids philosophers of education in developing alternative terms and frameworks, enhancing the efficacy of their research approaches within education, educational sciences, and philosophy of education. Philosophers are encouraged to embrace the continuous intervention of anti-foundational translation in their interactions and engagements with others and the incommensurable. Moreover, philosophers of education may discover that the same terms and frameworks can lead to vastly different, and occasionally conflicting, principles compared to conventional education, educational sciences, and, particularly, conventional philosophy of education. In public spheres, philosophers of education have the opportunity to contemplate and refine their use of terms and frameworks while undertaking research actions and engagements with others and the incommensurable. This could promote profound self-reflection on anthropocentrism, orientalism, logocentrism, and ethnocentrism, which may have inadvertently infiltrated their actions and practices.

Despite such extensive self-reflection, mistakes are inevitable. Complete immunity from errors and biases is unattainable, given the world's perpetual state of unpredictability and uncontrollability, and the constant evolution and transformation of human beings. Hannah Arendt underscores the importance of 'forgiveness' (*verzeihen*) and 'promise' (*versprechen*) in safeguarding discursive actions and practices from succumbing to modern enlightenment hubris or the banality of evil.[8] Building on this, I would like to aim to explore which issues the philosophy of education should address and respond to, through rigour and thorough reflection in future research.

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[7] Ibid.: p.369

[8] Hannah Arendt (1967), *VITA ACTIVA, oder Vom tätigen Leben* Piper Verlag GmbH, München. Chapter 5 discusses 'Forgive' (Verzeihen) and 'Promise' (Versprechen). *Zeihen* means to blame or condemn someone for a sin, whereas *sprechen* means to speak, talk, or tell a story either intentionally or involuntarily. It is prefixed by *ver-*, which means substitution, exceeding temporal limits, and various changes (such as closure, prevention, elimination, removal, consumption, distortion, reversal, and coercion). The original terms in German have nuances not present in Japanese or English.