

Navigating the Conundrum of Disciplinarity: A Case Study of Education

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Abstract: In the pursuit of advancement, where "development" acts as the guiding principle and "justice" and "democracy" constitute foundational concepts, pedagogy grapples with intricacies stemming from scientific theory, core values, and research paradigms. This complexity becomes a significant impediment to the progress of pedagogy. The confusion in pedagogical theory can be traced back to three pivotal factors: the discourse system, the statement system, and the theoretical conduct within pedagogy. Likewise, bewilderment surrounding the research value of pedagogy arises from the influence of relativism in pedagogical theory and challenges in assessing truth value. Furthermore, the pedagogy research paradigm exhibits traits of both "simplicity" and "dispersion." To facilitate a genuine resurgence in pedagogy, it is imperative to establish a pedagogical "core," reinstate core values to provide renewed guidance, and foster an interdisciplinary research paradigm to generate innovative ideas for pedagogy.

Keywords: Pedagogy subject confusion, Scientific theory, Discipline value, Research paradigm.

1. Introduction

Concept, research paradigm and its distinct research logic constitute the bedrock upon which a discipline attains its status. In the case of pedagogy, transforming from "a theory" into "a system" and evolving into knowledge, adhering to the principles of unity,^[1] entails the ability to articulate a cohesive system through rational arguments. This involves substantiating a series of accurate statements using a specific method or program that aligns with a logical framework. By achieving this, the developmental perplexities within pedagogy as a discipline can be effectively mitigated. At the very least, pedagogy would no longer find itself in the precarious position of being a "popular" research field, and it would stand a better chance of establishing its authority among various academic subjects, thereby acquiring the status of an independently valuable discipline. However, it is imperative to recognize that, in the contemporary landscape, mere satisfaction with the "differentiation" status of pedagogical subject construction, concentrating solely on future-oriented perspectives within school education, falls short of meeting the evolving expectations of pedagogy. Such an approach not only veers away from the core values of the pedagogical subject but also places education in a state of temporal confusion and developmental anxiety, hindering progress. As society advances, the concepts of "fairness," "democracy," and "freedom" transcend mere abstract notions, embedding themselves in the profound structure of individuals and society, becoming intrinsic elements rooted in the era's soil. Consequently, in an era where "development research" gains prominence, if pedagogy fails to anchor itself in present realities and life experiences, embracing a comprehensive research paradigm and updating its research logic, it risks gradually losing the foundational support for its development and the autonomy that underscores its inherent value.

2. The Current Subject Confusion of Pedagogy

As an intrinsic foundational discipline, pedagogy directs its focus toward the future, elucidating and exemplifying relevant core concepts within a comprehensive theoretical framework. This serves as both the foundation and the inception of pedagogy's developmental trajectory, acting as the bedrock for the discipline to situate itself in the present while envisioning the future. However, since the onset of the 21st century, heightened public awareness has presented new challenges to education, demanding the satisfaction of the public's yearning for "fairness" and meeting society's aspirations for further "development." Should the field of education persist in being secluded and resistant to adaptation, it is destined to wane and become obsolete in the face of contemporary demands. Recognizing that, for any science, "... empirical facts..... philosophy / conceptual facts, the two are not absolutely classified",^[2] pedagogy is no exception. Embracing the development of the times and asserting the value of its autonomous identity, both facets are indispensable, especially considering the already solid theoretical foundation of pedagogy. It becomes imperative to pivot towards "development research" to foster the "harmonious" evolution of these two dimensions.

2.1. The confusion of The Times: the "hardcore" confusion of pedagogy

"All scientific research programs are clearly different in their 'hardcore'."^[3] This implies that the 'hardcore' is not only specific to each discipline but also possesses irreplaceable and undeniable characteristics. Any alteration in the 'hardcore' signifies a replacement of the entire discipline, as refuting the 'hardcore' essentially relinquishes the entire theoretical framework of that discipline. In the context of pedagogy, its 'hardcore' pertains to its distinctive theoretical system and scientific nature. However, the prevalence of relativism and

ambiguity has led to confusion and perplexity within the 'hardcore' of the pedagogy discipline. This confusion obstructs the fusion of pedagogy with society and impedes the realization of its unique value in the broader context of the era. Regarding the fundamental concept of logical argument, the extensive confusion between "pedagogy" and "education" has created ambiguity in the development of educational discourse. Additionally, the lack of meticulous attention to the intrinsic differences between educational phenomena and the neglect of an in-depth understanding of educational knowledge have left the study of education in a state of perplexity, sometimes portraying pedagogy without a discernible sense of 'hardcore.' While conceptual confusion can be easily addressed through logical argumentation and conceptual elucidation, the conflation of these two understandings within the education community, particularly under public guidance, has further complicated matters. This confusion is evident not only in conceptualizing education as knowledge of educational phenomena but also in demanding that school education impart such an art of "education" to future generations. This is reflected in contemporary queries such as "What can one achieve through learning education?" or "What is the salary and job prospects?" Unfortunately, this prevailing sentiment dismissing pedagogy as "useless" exemplifies the broader implications of this situation.

2.2. Value confusion: the deviation from the core implication of pedagogy

The term "value" signifies the outcome of the interaction between the subject and object of value, fulfilling the subject's needs. The enlightenment value of a discipline serves as an inexhaustible impetus for its continuous development. If doubt or skepticism arises regarding its unique value, the first casualty is the theoretical foundation upon which the discipline is built, undermining the firm conviction in the truth of its disciplinary value—a fatal blow to the sustainable development of the discipline. However, whether in the era of pedagogical "differentiation" or during stages of pedagogical transformation, the core issue of deviation in the meaning of pedagogy has not been effectively addressed. The values of pedagogy and its social significance remain in a state of disarray, affecting both the public and the community of educational scholars. Moreover, the social value of pedagogy is inherently embedded within the discipline itself. The confusion of values in pedagogy extends to researchers' personal viewpoints and positions, keeping pedagogical research lagging behind educational and social values, thereby losing its predictive and leading role in shaping education and fundamental societal values. The concept of value encompasses both "positivity" and "utility" and involves the interaction between subject and object. In the face of facts, problems, or phenomena, adopting an objective and neutral value orientation allows for the identification of educational principles and provides references that align more closely with the core essence of the pedagogical discipline. Initiating research from a standpoint of value neutrality and independent value perspectives avoids confusion, preventing the degradation of pedagogical value. The scientific process of describing, analyzing, and revealing empirical facts is an evolving and improving process. If this process loses its value neutrality and incorporates researchers' personal positions, the process of revelation degenerates into a mere argumentative exercise.

2.3. Development confusion: the discrete of the pedagogy research paradigm

As an academic discipline, pedagogy should employ a rigorous and scientific research paradigm that evolves with the contemporary context. To overcome the challenges posed by the current era and strive for transcendence amid change, it is imperative for pedagogy to align itself with the prevailing trends. Presently, pedagogical research largely adheres to the antiquated paradigm established by Comenius and those predating him. Despite the evolution of Bacon's scientific empiricism in the age of big data, there remains a need for further refinement. Kant, predating Bacon, proposed the reform of pedagogical research paradigm by emphasizing the key concepts of "reason" and "experiment." While he acknowledged the role of experimentation alongside rational judgment in pedagogical research, this did not signify a departure from the empirical testing paradigm. Subsequent to Kant, Herbart spearheaded a pedagogical reform by integrating psychology into the field. This initiative broadened the scope of pedagogical research and facilitated the assimilation of valuable insights from the realm of psychology. However, Herbart and his adherents primarily focused on the practical application of psychological knowledge in teaching, neglecting the incorporation of psychology's research paradigm. Despite the infusion of knowledge from various disciplines into pedagogy, there has been a dearth of innovation in the research paradigm. While pedagogy occasionally borrows research methods from other fields, such as experimental methods and data analysis, these instances are confined to the methodological realm and fail to elevate to the level of a comprehensive research paradigm. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative research paradigms within pedagogy often exist in isolation, lacking effective integration. Consequently, the pedagogical research paradigm remains stagnant, disjointed, and lagging behind in a singular, discrete state.

3. Subject Confusion Attribution in Pedagogy

The perplexity surrounding the "hardcore" of pedagogy, the deviation of its core significance, or the fragmentation of its research paradigm transcends the theoretical aspects of pedagogy—embracing concerns related to its scientific essence, research value, and research paradigm. At its core, this perplexity reflects a fundamental commitment to the truth, akin to the truth-seeking endeavors intrinsic to natural sciences.

3.1. The confusion and attribution of the scientific nature of pedagogy theory

For an extended period, the theoretical foundation of pedagogy has conveyed a metaphysical aura rather than the rigor expected of a disciplined theory. If one were to reluctantly categorize it as a theory, its scientific nature has consistently faced skepticism, chiefly surfacing in three dimensions: the discourse system, the statement system, and the theoretical conduct of pedagogy. Regarding the discourse system, while any theory typically possesses an independent network of propositions, pedagogy lacks such a cohesive framework. The nature of pedagogy unfolds in a multitude of topics—ranging from the origin and developmental history of education to its intricate relationships, laws, and principles, creating an extensive and somewhat overwhelming subject

matter. This lack of a propositional network stems from the vastness of the topic system, instilling a sense of theoretical fragility. Similarly, the statement system within pedagogy often exhibits a discourse style that diverges from serious theoretical discourse, characterized by ambiguity, an emphasis on interpretation over logical argument, and prioritization of theoretical basis and practical results rather than intrinsic coherence. Moreover, the character of pedagogy theory tends to lean towards constructing an ideal educational realm based on prior categories, resulting in a profusion of theoretical propositions—educational principles, methods, and modes—mainly emanating from the subjective opinions of education scholars. This personal-centric approach confines pedagogy to private realms, preventing its transition into a comprehensive theoretical system, and contributes to the broader confusion and doubts surrounding the scientific nature of many pedagogical disciplines: the perceived lack of theoretical certainty within the pedagogy discipline. The field of pedagogy, with its unique research subject—people—introduces a level of complexity inherent in the diverse nature of human beings. This intricacy manifests in the variable efficacy of educational rules and teaching methods across different individuals or groups. The uncertainty within pedagogical disciplines, relative to other fields, is rooted in this complexity. However, it's crucial to recognize that uncertainty is not exclusive to pedagogy; it is a shared characteristic, albeit with varying degrees, across disciplines. Consider the evolving nature of light in the realm of natural sciences, undergoing transitions from the wave theory to the concept of photons and eventually embracing wave-particle duality. This uncertainty, while present, does not guarantee its resolution in the future. Pluralism in theoretical frameworks is a normative condition that exists across disciplines, and its presence in pedagogy should not serve as a basis for refuting the scientific nature of its theories. It's true that natural sciences, although uncertain, often possess repeatability and verifiability, a distinction that has been argued. However, the assertion that "an unrestricted theory is not a theory, and a theory is never a free theory"^[4] emphasizes the importance of constraints in theory construction. Natural sciences achieve repeatability under specific conditions, whereas humanities, particularly in education, face challenges due to the involvement of human subjects, ethical considerations, and the often unattainable theoretical conditions in real-life scenarios. Therefore, pedagogical theories, under their inherent limitations, are not contradictory; achieving coherence in thinking and logic is possible without succumbing to pessimism.

3.2. The confusion and attribution of the value of pedagogy research

Relativism within the theory of pedagogy, is to make pedagogy "theory of useless theory" deeply rooted in the education researchers thinking idea, because relativism, "more and more education scholars no longer believe in the cognitive sense of right and wrong, no longer believe that the results are true and false, no longer believe in truth, may be good, no longer believe in the power of theory and thought, no longer believe in the specification to explore the possibility and necessity".^[5] Relativism, in essence, represents a compromise rather than a principled theoretical stance. Overcoming the influence of relativism is imperative for education to transcend the limitations imposed by practical considerations and achieve the integration of theoretical

constructs with logical thinking. To mitigate the adverse impact of relativism, especially on the value of pedagogical theory, it is crucial to elucidate its essence. Recognizing that the "theory of truth is conditional"^[6] underscores that truth can only manifest under specific conditions; otherwise, it is deemed false. The absoluteness of truth, contingent on conditions, implies confirmation without falsification. The fallacy of relativism lies in its disregard for the conditional nature of truth, undermining the foundation of truth itself. To address this, it is paramount to dispel the ideological confusion propagated by relativism and redirect the focus toward the genuine research value of pedagogy. Consider the context of pedagogy as the interaction between subjects and objects in the education and teaching process. In a teaching environment, the teacher assumes the role of the subject, while in a free and unstructured setting, both teachers and students become the primary subjects. Breaking free from the shackles of specious relativism and adhering to the "conditional" characteristics of theory are prerequisites for extricating pedagogy from the realm of "useless theory." Simultaneously, recognizing the oversimplified evaluation of truth's value by individuals contributes to the confusion surrounding the value of pedagogy. In the pursuit of truth evaluation, the initial inclination toward practical testing and the application of educational theory in educational activities is apparent. This emphasis on practicality in testing holds great significance, yet, to a certain extent, it leads to an oversight in evaluating theory and grasping the essence of nature. As articulated, "The role of strict scientific logic proof is nothing but an indirect and concentrated expression of the function of practice test"^[7]. Therefore, while acknowledging the ultimate method of practically testing theory, it is imperative not to neglect the direct evaluation method of theory, namely logic. Progress is achieved through the continuous "break" in addressing both practical and theoretical issues. The impact of relativism and a misguided understanding of truth evaluation constitutes significant reasons for the perplexity surrounding the value of pedagogical research. Considering the deficiencies in the current value attribution within the field of pedagogy, it becomes essential to delve deeper into the truth and value aspects to dispel pessimistic sentiments regarding its development. The research value of the pedagogical subject remains influenced by the prevailing era. Although the contemporary focus is on a "development"-oriented social research orientation, pedagogy lags behind in the era of "differentiation," failing to undergo a timely transformation. The discipline of pedagogy should not solely orient itself toward the future but should be firmly grounded in the present. Only through a balanced and harmonious consideration of both aspects can the value of pedagogical discipline manifest, alleviating the confusion surrounding its inherent worth.

3.3. The confusion and attribution of the pedagogy research paradigm

The prolonged reluctance to classify pedagogy as a science stem from its perceived inability to analyze the objective world akin to natural sciences, thereby failing to unveil the inherent laws. In most cases, pedagogy "revel in its own scientific illusion, which not only delays the growth of real scientific pedagogy, but also hinders the construction of other types of educational theories".^[8] The determination of whether a research paradigm or method belongs to the humanities or the natural sciences, pedagogy, or another

discipline is fundamentally contingent on the characteristics of the research paradigm itself and the problems under investigation, with little relevance to the method per se. The applicability of a method to a specific discipline or research question is contingent upon its alignment with the research question. Similar to how the construction method of mathematical models can find utility in educational research, pedagogical researchers from other disciplines' research paradigms can be approached with an open-minded perspective, facilitating their adaptation, referencing, and transformation to align with the unique characteristics of pedagogy. Despite Herbart's semi-successful application of the psychological research paradigm in pedagogy, it remains an incomplete integration into the pedagogical research paradigm, offering valuable insights for its improvement and development. The multifaceted and dynamic nature of pedagogy's research object, namely complex and evolving individuals, necessitates the use of comprehensive research methods by educational researchers. Pedagogy, being rooted in the entirety of life, should not harbor feelings of inferiority regarding its methods; on the contrary, it is the peculiar nature of pedagogy that bestows it with unique value. The current confusion in the research paradigm of pedagogy primarily arises from two aspects: the "uniformity" and "dispersion" of pedagogical research paradigms, both stemming from the "differentiation" within pedagogy. To achieve comprehensive research methods, it is imperative to first enrich the developmental soil of pedagogy itself. Concerning "simplicity," pedagogy traditionally emphasizes the structure of its basic theoretical system, logical argumentation, and theoretical speculation. However, by solely focusing on constructing theoretical frameworks, the discipline tends to overlook the complexity of real-life educational practices. Regarding "discreteness," the prevalent division of research paradigms into qualitative and quantitative methods creates challenges when applied to specific educational phenomena, making it difficult for the pedagogy discipline to seamlessly integrate theory and practice or discern the underlying laws of education. It is essential to recognize that research paradigms are not mutually exclusive, and their application should be context-specific. Educational researchers should adopt comprehensive research methods while maintaining an educational perspective, thereby advancing the development of pedagogical research paradigms.

4. Education Is Really Back

Pedagogy is a distinctive and universal discipline, as it shares fundamental elements like concepts, research paradigms, and logic with other disciplines, endowing it with intrinsic value and multifaceted functions. This convergence also sets pedagogy apart. Its uniqueness lies in its direct engagement with "people" and "life," presenting a mission unparalleled by any other discipline. Throughout history, the enduring themes of "survival will" and "power" have persisted, though the emphasis on the former has waned in the current era of rapid material civilization development. The spotlight is now on "power." Consequently, questions arise about how to approach and wield this power, leading to inquiries about its pursuit, utilization, and consequences. Pedagogy addresses these questions by teaching individuals about humanity, life, and the significance of a meaningful existence. In simpler terms, its objective is to impart knowledge about good and evil, beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, as well as the distinctions between the virtuous

and the malevolent. While pedagogy may, for various reasons, momentarily lag behind the pace of contemporary society, struggling to provide effective guidance and practical solutions, time itself acts as a catalyst for the transformation of pedagogy. This transformation is essential to ensure that pedagogical disciplines align seamlessly with the evolving needs of society, allowing them to once again walk hand in hand with the era.

4.1. The transformation of ubiquitous education provides the "hardcore of The Times" for pedagogy

We are currently in an era marked by the maturation of educators, an era that prioritizes learner satisfaction, and one in which each school is expected to function optimally, ensuring effective teaching for every student. The advent of information technology, coupled with its deep integration into education, has given rise to the age of ubiquitous education. The evolution of the relationship between information technology and education can be categorized into three stages: initially, information technology served as an auxiliary tool for teaching; subsequently, there was a merging of online and offline modes, exemplified by micro-curricula, flipped classrooms, and MOOCs; and finally, traditional school education has transformed into ubiquitous education. Ubiquitous education is characterized by the flexibility for individuals to learn any content at any time and from any location, emphasizing personalized learning paths according to individual preferences and progress. This shift from traditional education, characterized by fixed schedules and locations, where teachers exert control over teaching and learning, promises to redefine the "hardcore" of the education discipline. The redefinition is evident in four key aspects: first, the emphasis on "personalized" hardcore, manifesting through new curriculum systems and teaching approaches tailored to individual student development. Second, the recognition of "critical" hardcore, prioritizing the enhancement of critical thinking skills amidst an era of information overload. Third, the focus on "comprehensive capability" as hardcore, addressing the interdisciplinary nature and knowledge integration, responding to the challenges presented by the times. Fourth, acknowledging "social responsibility" as hardcore, recognizing the necessity for pedagogy to engage with social, political, and economic issues, providing unique insights and guiding societal development. As education is intrinsically linked to life's inquiries and practical considerations, navigating this crossroads in pedagogy requires grounding in real-life practices, seizing the new hardcore of the discipline in the era, and offering solutions for societal development and future direction. Facilitating the successful transition to ubiquitous education within the field of pedagogy represents not only a historic task for the development and innovation of pedagogy but also the formidable challenge modern society poses to the traditional discipline of pedagogy.

4.2. The return of core values to provide new guidance for pedagogy

To delve into the reclamation of the core value of pedagogy, it is imperative to initiate this discourse by examining the essence of its value. As previously discussed, the pervasive disarray surrounding the value predicament in pedagogy, both within the discipline itself and its societal implications, constitutes the fundamental source of the discipline's value

ambiguity. What then constitutes the genuine core value of pedagogy? In the typical analysis undertaken by pedagogical researchers, education facts, problems, and phenomena, as well as the exploration of educational laws, are consistently approached from personal perspectives, individual value orientations, and subjective comprehension of pedagogical functions. These scholars adopt appropriate research paradigms, employ rigorous logical systems, and construct comprehensive theoretical frameworks for the pedagogical discipline. However, the viewpoint from the subject of pedagogy, emphasizing value function, is frequently overlooked. In essence, discussions about pedagogy tend to drift away from pedagogy itself. Drawing inspiration from Kant's assertion that "reason does not derive its laws from nature but imposes them upon nature," a parallel can be drawn for pedagogy: "value does not derive its laws from pedagogy but imposes them upon pedagogy." Rejecting itself to construct a restraining entity seems inherently unreasonable. "We can only understand things within the limits of our comprehension." Regardless of the depth of insight into a subject, it remains within the scope of personal understanding. The value of pedagogy aligns with this perspective, with various schools of thought and societal segments interpreting its value differently—politicians view it as a "political" product, economists scrutinize its value through economic lenses. However, the inherent value of pedagogy, existing independently and awaiting elucidation, is frequently overlooked. Thus, when researchers engage in theoretical arguments, it becomes crucial to validate these theories in practical life. As mentioned earlier, when testing pedagogy's conclusive discoveries, practical tests are often prioritized over theoretical arguments. Yet, in the discovery process, excessive focus on theoretical arguments can overshadow the inherent value of pedagogy within practical life. This predicament persists in discussions about general values in pedagogy, let alone its core values, where interests often influence interpretation. To seek truths in life practice, validate them through theoretical arguments, and ultimately reintegrate the results into life practice will invariably foster the advancement of practice itself. This revelation originates from life's intricacies and queries, prompting the question: Can something within life not stimulate its own development? Granted, skepticism may arise, questioning the absence of flaws and how to address them. Human nature, adept at identifying personal benefits, tends to resolve such issues during the process of theoretical validation. In summation, the educational subject should reconnect with its authentic core value and continually undergo a dynamic interplay between theory and practice, thereby offering fresh developmental guidance for education and aligning with the evolving ethos of the times, social advancement, and individual progress.

4.3. The development of interdisciplinary research paradigm provides new ideas for pedagogy

The research paradigm, or research method, does not inherently possess subject distinctions and lacks essential differences; rather, it serves as a means, a pathway. It does not enjoy exclusive privileges within a particular discipline, as the same research paradigm or method is frequently applied across different disciplines. Its significance and value lie in its compatibility with the problems and phenomena under investigation, akin to Mao Zedong's assertion: "Our task is to cross the river, but we cannot cross without a bridge or a boat.

Without solving the problem of a bridge or a boat, crossing the river is an empty word. Without solving the problem, the task is just a lie."^[9] The research paradigm or method represents the "bridge" or "boat," addressing the essential task of "crossing the river." In the absence of a task, the research paradigm or method loses its value, and discussions about "methods" without a corresponding "task" become obfuscated. This holds true for the research paradigm or research method in pedagogy, which exists to unravel educational phenomena and discern the laws of education. Regrettably, academia, and even the educational community itself, often neglects this perspective, erroneously assuming that the core of pedagogy revolves around "people," who are intricate and unpredictable. Critics argue that employing research paradigms or methods from the natural sciences is futile, given the ever-changing nature of human behavior—some even label pedagogy as "irregular." However, due to the inherent complexity of "people," the discipline of pedagogy increasingly embraces interdisciplinary research paradigms. Only through such multidimensional exploration can the essence of the core be revealed, uncovering the profound "deep structure" within "people." Examples include experimental pedagogy utilizing research methods from the natural sciences and spiritual science education employing interpretive methods for researching education. Consequently, leveraging interdisciplinary research and incorporating research paradigms and methods from diverse disciplines, such as sociology, economics, history, statistics, etc., assumes vital and far-reaching significance. This approach promotes the examination of educational facts, problems, and phenomena, facilitating a profound exploration of educational laws. Particularly in an era characterized by the rapid expansion and explosion of knowledge, failure to promptly adopt a comprehensive research paradigm could lead pedagogy to lag behind contemporary developments and be forsaken by the times. Therefore, embracing the spirit of "integrating hundreds of schools and absorbing the strengths of others" and advancing interdisciplinary research paradigms is essential for pedagogy to offer fresh perspectives and contribute to the enrichment and development of pedagogical theory and value implications.

In summary, during the era of pedagogy's subject "development," concepts such as "fairness," "democracy," and "freedom" have become deeply ingrained in societal values, demanding practical realization. To transcend the developmental challenges of our times, pedagogy must evolve by fortifying its subject theory system, integrating research paradigms, and aligning with the values of the new era. Grounded in a fertile developmental landscape, pedagogy should refocus on practical education, guiding the mission of era-wide progress. Through a dynamic interplay of theory and practice, it must actively break away from stagnation, fostering continual self-improvement, and ultimately escaping the confusion that currently plagues the discipline.

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