

Towards a creative conception of philosophy of education: The implications of Deleuzian thinking

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Abstract

Philosophy of education, as a discipline, has been constantly transformed by the transition of dominant philosophies in history. This paper aims to trace two key formations of philosophy of education: the analytic and critical traditions of philosophy respectively, and further to grasp a future orientation as creative with particular reference to the philosophy of Deleuze and the recent development of contemporary continental philosophy. As the concern of immanence returns to contemporary continental philosophy, Deleuzian thinking of becoming and creation not only helps us to approach the concept of difference, no longer from the ideology of transcendence, but also provides another perceptive to deal with the issue of politics of culture and identity in pedagogy. This paper is mainly based on the Deleuzian conception of philosophy in the book 'What is Philosophy' to further its exploration of future education of philosophy.

Introduction

In a certain sense, this paper is a response to the questions raised by Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish (2003). While theory lost its universal validity with the demise of universalism, what will be the future orientation of philosophy of education? By reflection of the development of philosophy of education in English speaking world with particular reference to Deleuzian conception of philosophy as concept-creation, this paper argues that a creative style of philosophizing may serve as a potential future orientation of philosophy of education in replacement of the analytic and critical styles.

The analytic style of philosophizing in philosophy of education

According to the historical review provided by Blake et al. (2003), the development of philosophy of education as a distinct sub-discipline in English speaking world, is profoundly indebted to the style of being analytic. The analytic philosophy of education tried to achieve “a coherent and systematic rationalization of educational beliefs and practice” by the neutrality of linguistic and analytic methods (Blake et al., 2003, p. 4). In that case, philosophizing may be equal to clarification, namely, a matter of exercising techniques to dispel the confusions and mystification. The main purpose of philosophy of education then is thus “to identify and expose fallacies in reasoning” (Blake et al., 2003, p. 2).

Such overemphasis on the epistemic coherence ignored the importance of ‘matters of substance’ in real rational practice. Therefore, the influence of Kant and Kantian universalism contributed to the promotion of “autonomy as a primary education aim” as a deeper understanding of rational and a better embodiment of rationalization in the practice of education (Blake et al., 2003, p. 4). However, such Kantian conception of critical and autonomy is practiced within the liberalism in education and shows its own problem of social authoritarianism. The supposed formal neutrality of liberalism is later severely criticized by those social groups (in ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality etc.), which were marginalized by the social mainstream. As a result, the issues of identity and community become the key concerns in the practice of education, and the universal, ‘transcendental and purely formal post-Kantian ego’ becomes problematic with the influence of Marxism, critical theory and the post-structuralist movement. The critical style of philosophizing consequently forms another style of philosophy of education, questioning, what knowledge, which powers and whose experience?

The critical style of philosophizing in philosophy of education

For the classical Marxian paradigm, education is “functioning within the hegemonic social system which is organized by and serves the interest of capital” (Kellner, 2003, p. 163). Therefore, alternative mode of education is needed, in order to promote class and revolutionary consciousness. The later appropriation of Marxism in the development of the Frankfurt school and the critical theorist after is further focused at the inter-entanglement of consciousness, ideology, culture and socialization. Thus, how to transform “individuals and societies through change of consciousness, culture and the institutions of everyday life” thus becomes the main concern of educational practice (Kellner, 2003, p. 165). It is even argued, for the Frankfurt school, that through ideological reproduction and “enculturating individuals into the dominate systems of needs, thought and behavior”, mass consumption and culture were producing a consumer society “based on homogenous needs and desires for mass-produced products” (Kellner, 2003, p. 167). Criticizing the hidden reproduction in schooling of such society, the so-called critical pedagogy, is therefore called to promote a different educational process, in order to ‘produce revolutionary subjects, empowered to overthrow oppression and to create a more democratic and just social order’ (Kellner, 2003, p. 171). One representative effort is Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed in Brazil, aimed at transforming “individuals from being objects of educational processed to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation” (Kellner, 2003, p. 171). As a result, the influence of Marxism, the Frankfurt school and critical pedagogy reform a Kantian universal conception of critical and autonomy into a historical, cultural, contextual, subjective awareness of our social structural experience and consciousness of difference.

In such conception of critical, the difference of the subject of experience and action is recognized and affirmed. ‘The incredulity towards autonomy’ is gradually voiced and the skepticism about universality and universalism is further enhanced in the post-structuralist movement. Furthermore, although the critical style of philosophy of education, in a sense, rejected the naïve neutrality of analytic style of rationalization, the agency and the emancipation possibility of Marxist revolutionary subjects remains supposedly universal and transcendental existent. It is presumed that the transcendence of consciousness can undoubtedly serve as the guarantee of transformation and progress. It is in this respect that the post-structuralist movement can offer us some clues of different style of philosophizing. As Peters and Humes (2003) pointed out, the emphasis of post-structuralist thought is on anti-essentialism and “tends to historicize questions of ontology, investigating the cultural construction of subjectivity genealogically” (Peters & Humes, 2003, p. 111). Against transcendental arguments and viewpoints, the post-structuralist movement deconstructs the claim of ‘WE’ and the presupposed subjectivity; instead, it highlights the positionality of the subject and focuses on the discursive formations and historical becomings of subjectivity. To a certain extent, the post-structuralist movement seems to show us another style of philosophizing beyond universalism and transcendentalism.

Consequently, there seems to be some possibilities in the post-structuralist thoughts to deal with the questions that Blake et al. (2003) argued the philosophers of education are facing:

... if, with the demise of universalism, theory can no longer claim universal validity, then how are we to characterize practice, both in education and philosophy of education; and where might theory come from, if there is still any need for theory at all (p.6)?

In a certain sense, this paper is precisely a response to these questions. With particular reference to Deleuzian conception of philosophy as concept-creation, one of the leading post-structuralist thinkers, this paper argues that a creative style of philosophizing may serve as a potential future orientation of philosophy of education to move beyond the ghost of universalism and transcendence in the previous styles of philosophizing.

The Deleuzian conception of philosophizing: concept-creation as the style of philosophizing

The Deleuzian conception of the nature of philosophy offers us another style of philosophizing. In the book, ‘What is Philosophy’, Deleuze systemically defines philosophy as the activity of concept creation, which is in opposition to the action of contemplation, reflection or communication. For Deleuze, the latter are the “machines for constituting Universals” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 6); a list of “four great errors”

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 49) is therefore provided to reveal the illusions in philosophy. Such illusions, including the one of transcendence, of universals, of the eternal and of discursiveness, will stop our thinking and leave no room for the becoming of thinking.

For Deleuze, our thinking is “a projection of the transcendent on the plane of immanence” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 89). In Deleuzian another term, philosophy is “a geophilosophy” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 95), which refers to the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by which concept is create on the plane of immanence. Deleuze emphasizes that transcendence is ‘empty in itself’, which can be possible only when it “descends and crosses different hierarchized levels that are projected together on a region of the plane” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 95). Therefore, in fact, transcendence is something immanent that actualized through becoming. He thus argues that philosophy is about Singularity rather than Universals, for “universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 7). The purpose of philosophy is therefore no longer oriented as the search for something universal, eternal and transcendence, in order to serve as the unshakable foundation for justification and critique. Instead, for Deleuze, philosophy is something singular, contingent and immanence, generating from the process of becoming. As a result, the Deleuzian conception of philosophy emphasizes the becoming process of our knowing and thinking. Deleuze considers that the very path towards such becoming-thinking is through concept creation. He stressed that “you will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them...To create concepts is, at the very least, to make something. This alters the question of philosophy’s use or usefulness, or even of its harmfulness” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 7). For Deleuze, such “exclusive right of concept creation secures a function for philosophy” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 8). Why does Deleuze stress ‘concept creation’ so much in philosophizing?

This is because, for Deleuze, it is the problems that grant the meaning to concept and initiate the activity of philosophy. Deleuze wrote:

A concept requires not only a problem through which it recasts or replaces earlier concepts but a junction of problems where it combines with other coexisting concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 18).

Deleuze claims that within one concept there are indeed “three inseparable components: possible world, existing face and real language or speech” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 17). For Deleuze, “the concept is act of thought, it is thought operating at infinite (although greater or lesser) speed” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 21). “It is infinite through its survey or its speed but finite through its movement that trances the contour of its components” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 21). In Deleuze’s conception of philosophy, while concept serves as “the contour, the configuration, the constellation of an event to come” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 32-33) and “shapes and reshapes the event in its own way” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 34), the plane holds concepts together and “secures conceptual linkages with ever increasing connections” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 37). Thus, certain concept is based on such conditions to be created to respond and “the conditions of the philosophical problem are found on the plane of immanence”. Deleuze put in this way,

All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 16).

This is why Deleuze argued that “the question of philosophy is the singular point where concept and creation are related to each other” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 11). For Deleuze, the question of philosophy is not only where philosophy arises but also the site the whole concept creation grounds and gains its substance. The enemies of philosophy mainly result from the ignorance of “the nature of concept as the reality of philosophy” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 11).

Deleuze claims that “concepts are only created as a function of problems which are thought to be badly understood or badly posed (pedagogy of the concept)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 16). Concept is created

to serve as one certain pedagogy to deal with the problem, and further define what philosophy is. Deleuze believes that “so long as there is a time and a place for creating philosophy, the operation that undertakes this will always be called philosophy, or will be distinguishable from philosophy even if it is called something else” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 16). In that case, for Deleuze, it is the activity of creation concept that characterizes the essence of philosophy. Deleuze argues:

The task of philosophy when it creates concepts, entities, is always to extract an event from things and beings, to set up the new event from things and beings, always to give them as new event: space, time, matter, thought, the possible as events (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 33).

For Deleuze, philosophy as a constructionism of event involves ‘three elements’: “the prephilosophical plane it may lay out (immanence), the persona or personae it must invent and bring to life (insistence), and the philosophical concepts it must create (consistency)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 76-77). Deleuze thus thinks “laying out, inventing and creating constitute the philosophical trinity—diagrammatic, personalistic, and intensive features” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 77). In other words, in Deleuze’s conception of philosophy, “philosophy is not a discursive formation, because it does not link propositions together” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 22). It is the constructionism of singularity and event that characterizes the essence of philosophy. Deleuze claims:

The greatness of a philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or it enables us to release in concepts. So the unique, exclusive bond between concepts and philosophy as a creative discipline must be tested in its finest details. The concept belongs to philosophy and only to philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 34).

For Deleuze, concept is exclusively about philosophy. And, “[e]very creation is singular and the concept as a specifically philosophical creation is always a singularity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 7). In this way, philosophy is considered as ‘a constructivism’ of event, having “two qualitatively different complementary aspects: the creation of concepts and the laying out of a plane” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 35-36). Deleuze further explains, ‘concepts are events, but the plane is the horizon of events, the reservoir or reserve of purely conceptual events’; being ‘the absolute horizon’, the plane is ‘which makes the event as concept independent of a visible state of affairs in which it is brought about’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 36).

In other words, philosophy is something about the construction of event through ‘concept’ and ‘a plane’. Concept creation is the style of philosophizing that can provide us a different path beyond analytical and critical tradition of philosophy of education. Deleuze warned us that

... due to the failure of recognition the intimacy with concept creation, philosophy has confronted successive challengers stemming from the human sciences, particularly sociology, then the turn of epistemology, of linguistics, of psychoanalysis and logical analysis, and finally all the disciplines of communication, including computer science, marketing, design and advertising respectively (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 10).

Consequently, according to Deleuze, concept creation not only defines the essence of philosophy but also offers a different path, which moves beyond the presumptions the previous styles of philosophizing are based, such as universalism and transcendence, and also show us the possible new style of future philosophizing.

Conclusion: towards a creative style as the future of philosophy of education

Within such Deleuzian conception of philosophy, the emphasis on ‘the prephilosophical plane it may lay out (immanence), the persona or personae it must invent and bring to life (insistence), and the philosophical concepts it must create (consistency)’ remind us of the awareness of the significance of concrete and singular context which generates each particular concept creation in our philosophizing. Particularly for the concern of philosophy of education, such awareness may provide us a better understanding of the purpose and the

process of thinking. The purpose of thinking is not merely for the clarification or critique, but, more importantly, to invent ourselves, to provoke the becoming of thinking. For the process of thinking, understanding the becoming of thinking shows us not only the inability of transcendence and universality in concept creation, but also the domination of identity over difference in our thinking and lives via the style of philosophizing.

If there is the future of philosophy of education, it must be the one created and actualized from the immanence of our present and ourselves, via the becoming process of thinking. Such a style of philosophizing needs to be creative and immanent to us, in order to let us constantly become different from ourselves. It is precisely the becoming process that counts as education, while we become different via concept creation.

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