

Context, Concepts and Content: Prescriptions for Empirical Research

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The author argues for the importance of sound philosophising for empirical research in education. Without a clear and coherent conceptualisation of the context of research—in this case, the educational enterprise—the appropriateness of a particular piece of research cannot be assessed. We are in need of a satisfactorily articulated nucleus of key concepts in education. In addition, the concepts on which the research is focused need to be satisfactorily articulated, and the particular content in question needs to be regarded as a key variable. The paper helps to show what is involved in satisfactory conceptualization.

L'auteur souligne l'importance de la formulation de concepts philosophiques cohérents pour la recherche empirique en éducation. Sans une conceptualisation claire du contexte dans lequel s'insère la recherche—dans ce cas, la démarche pédagogique—il est impossible d'évaluer la pertinence d'une recherche donnée. Il nous faut un ensemble bien articulé de concepts clés en éducation. Les concepts sur lesquels la recherche est axée doivent en outre être formulés d'une manière cohérente et le contenu de la recherche doit être considéré comme une variable clé. L'article contribue à élucider les exigences d'une telle conceptualisation.

Since, in its original form, this paper served as the introduction to a conference at which a number of philosophers addressed themselves to questions about the future of educational research, I attempt herein to articulate some basic but practically important points about the need for some sound philosophical rivets in the structure of educational research. In the event, although a great deal of animated discussion and disagreement arose amongst conference participants on a number of issues, there was not much objection to the specific points that I summarize at the end of this paper.

Such formal agreement, however, in my view, obscures the fact that, in practice, educational research is often of poor quality because it fails to take account satisfactorily of one or more of my seven prescriptions. Why this should be so—why many researchers should fail to make basic conceptual and logical moves competently, when formally they generally acknowledge the need for them—I am not sure. (This question intrigues Wilson, and he touches on it in this volume.) But that it is so I regard as beyond dispute; and I have attempted to document that claim, illustrating the philosophical

weakness of many respected instances of empirical research, in my *Giving Teaching Back to Teachers* (1984).

Because I do not want to repeat things that I have said there and because, having made the negative charge, I would rather attempt to be positive, I do not in this paper seek to give examples of deficiencies in actual research. Instead, I try to spell out in the abstract those philosophical aspects of educational research that are crucial to its quality and worth. Some of what I say, I confess, does strike me as fairly obvious and incontestable. Nonetheless, in serving it up to the patient reader yet again, I plead the urgent necessity of getting researchers to *act* on the “obvious and incontestable” message. I hope that a simple description of these necessary elements in good research, uncluttered by ad hominem criticism, will serve as a useful backdrop, perhaps even as a checklist, to those researchers who are not technically students of philosophy.

Egan and I encountered a particular form of disquiet amongst some of our colleagues when we first began to plan a conference on the future of educational research. We had originally intended to involve a wide variety of speakers from different disciplines, and with different experiences of research. For practical reasons that ambitious project had to be modified, and we then decided to concentrate on philosophers with an interest in research rather than to bring together lone individuals to represent various different backgrounds. That led directly to the disquiet. “What right,” the question ran, “have you philosophers to talk about research? It is simply inappropriate, not to say mischievous, for those who are not experienced practitioners of research to criticize it.”

A number of small points need to be made at once. First, although the word *research* is increasingly used as a synonym for *empirical research*, there is no obvious warrant for this, and philosophers are presumably well qualified to talk about philosophical research if nothing else. Second, the question of who counts as a *practitioner* of empirical research is not as straightforward as it seems. After all, in many empirical research projects the legwork—the actual observation and so forth—is done largely by assistants, while the senior researchers’ role is confined to design and interpretation of data. That kind of role makes the practitioners’ experience more akin to that of the historical or philosophical researcher than is usually suggested. Third, most of the contributors published here do in fact have quite extensive experience of empirical research, certainly in the sense of “practitioner” just referred to, but also in the more prosaic sense of being directly involved in observation of one sort or another.

However, the more important point is that the question of whether philosophers are or are not well suited by their professional expertise critically to examine empirical research depends entirely on what kind of questions are to be addressed. To be sure, there are a number of practical and

technical questions about such research that one could not reasonably seek to answer without some experience of carrying it out: for example, how teachers react to the intrusion of researchers or to the attempt to implement a new program in this way rather than that. But there are also a number of questions to be asked about the nature of such research—for instance, underlying questions about the coherence and logical sense of trying to research particular problems in one way rather than another or of trying to implement particular sorts of programs in particular ways. There are also questions to be asked about the educational relevance of certain types of inquiry. These kinds of questions *are* philosophical, whether one likes it or not.

To point out that they are philosophical questions is not to say that they have to be reserved for the exclusive attention of those who are professionally classified and paid as philosophers—indeed, one of my worries is the extent to which at the moment empirical researchers do leave the philosophizing to philosophers and thereby help to exacerbate a false polarization. But nonetheless, such questions about the sense and appropriateness of various kinds of empirical research in education are not themselves empirical and are not materially affected by firsthand experience, while they do require philosophical *nous* or acumen. To cope with them, one no more needs to engage in empirical research, in the sense of carrying out program of observation, than the philosopher of religion needs to have religious faith, the philosopher of art to be a creative artist, or, for that matter, the articulate football commentator to be an experienced player. One need only know about the research, be familiar with it. That is, one needs the kind of understanding gained from *studying* what the empirical research involves, rather than from *conducting* it.

As I have just indicated, I am concerned about the extent to which empiricists tend to leave philosophical questions to philosophers and the extent to which discussion about empirical research carried on by practitioners themselves concentrates on technical and practical rather than philosophical matters. Sometimes, no doubt, this happens because these matters are what interest them; but sometimes, I suspect, it happens because they are not very clear about the difference and, so, wrongly think that discussing the relative strengths and weaknesses of different types of research is the same thing as exploring the question of whether any of the various types of research make any educational sense or could be said to be logically suited to the nature of that into which they seek to inquire. I am concerned about this mainly because arguments about the technical advantages and disadvantages of one type of empirical research over another must surely necessarily be secondary to the philosophical arguments about the nature of the whole business. There is little point in discussing how best to organize or

design a book until you have a pretty clear idea of what kind of book you want: what is its subject matter to be? who is it for? what is it supposed to do for them? and so on. In much the same way, there is little point in worrying about whether someone's use of statistics is faulty or whether a correlation coefficient is high enough to be significant if one is not prepared, first, to consider whether the program of research as a whole is logically suited to its particular task of inquiry.

In what follows I shall attempt to argue that good empirical research in education is necessarily dependent on attention being paid to context, concepts and content, at least as much as to technical matters, and that such attention is inherently philosophical in kind.

CONTEXT

Let us, for a moment, compare the domains of physical medicine and psychiatry. On the whole, we are more trusting of research in the former, and probably rightly so. Doctors are more dogmatic in the former area without the same risk of being called ideologues. Why is this? Is it just that psychiatry is a younger branch of medicine—as some argue—the only difference between social science and natural science is that the former is far younger? Is it essentially the same, merely harder? Is it just a question of technical difficulties? No. Fundamentally, the *context* of research is in the one case relatively clear and stable compared to the other. What constitutes physical well-being is a great deal better articulated than what constitutes psychological well-being. And so on down the line. Whether I am truly depressed is harder to determine than whether I am bleeding. It is *conceptually* harder to determine. It may also be something that would be harder to observe empirically, if we knew what it was. But the vital logically prior point is that we don't even know what depression is in the way that we know what bleeding is. (To provide a clear definition of depression in observable terms, which could of course easily be done, would be to ignore the question of whether that involves a true understanding of depression—the state of mind that people actually experience.) It is true that many things can be readily recognized (and researched) by those who could not define them well: one can measure feet without having a philosopher's grasp of the concept of a foot. But when one is dealing with matters that are not readily recognizable, such as psychological states and many important educational concepts—for example, need, interest, intelligence, enthusiasm, understanding, and being educated itself—then judgment and observation relating to them is crucially dependent on a sophisticated grasp of the concepts in question.

The first positive observation, then, is that we must operate within a *context*. The priority for any confused or complex area of study is to knock some

shape into it—to define it. But, more to the point, it is literally nonsensical to have a highly developed methodology without reference to the particular nature of what is being investigated. Good historical research, for example, is logically related to and dependent on conceptions of history. Marxist historians do not simply have a distinctive methodology, which one can argue in the abstract is a better means of getting at the truth; they have a distinctive conception of history. Arguments about structuralism and other types of literary criticism are similarly essentially conceptual. So too, to take a third example, celebrated arguments about the nature of science such as Popper's have enormous implications for the practice of scientific inquiry.

It therefore seems undeniable that in education we need a nucleus of key *concepts*, to help define the context, in the same way that there is such a nucleus in medicine or physics. It may be pointed out, correctly, that even in physics concepts are being constantly refined, not to say discarded from time to time. Nonetheless physicists work in a world where, by and large, they have a full and shared understanding of concepts such as force and atom that define their area of discourse, organize it, and, to some extent, dictate procedure. In the same way, there cannot be a coherent body of educational research except in the light of a clear conception of the educational enterprise: what ought schools to be for? what is education, as opposed to training, socialization, and so on? what constitutes critical thinking, creativity, educational achievement, understanding, intellectual interest, and other such things that may be thought to be the organizing concepts of education?

Here I am talking about the context within which one is researching rather than the conceptualization of what one is researching. Empirical educational researchers, to do their job properly, must have this understanding, just as those who research a particular moral issue such as abortion or promise-keeping must have some clearly articulated understanding of morality. Where this is lacking, we get the kind of confusion that leads some to produce technically highly sophisticated values-clarification exercises that bear no obvious relation to the development of the truly moral understanding with which they purport to be concerned. But one cannot just wish this contextual understanding into existence. It requires further work, since the fact is that we do not have many shared conceptions of key educational notions, and in many cases we do not even have entirely satisfactory ones available.

It follows from this that, in the interests of improved empirical research in education, we need

1. continued philosophical research into the nature of the educational enterprise;
2. attention to such research from those not directly engaged in it. We can no longer

afford attempts to dismiss philosophical questions as theoretical, irrelevant, or somebody else's concern;

3. some statement about the wider context from the progenitor of a specific piece of empirical research. That is to say, in every piece of research we must be told how the researcher understands the context. This is not necessarily a question of agreeing with philosophers but of the empiricists doing their own philosophizing. If, for example, the research centres on the hypothesis that small group teaching is an effective teaching strategy, we want to know not merely what measures were used to establish learning, progress, and achievement (technical matters) but also how those measures are conceptually related to educational success (or success in some other legitimate concern of schooling such as socialization or moral education). At its crudest, we need to know not only that progress was measured by performance on certain standardized tests, but also why it is thought to matter that children do well on these particular tests. What have they to do with education?

CONCEPTS

The more specific matter being researched must also be conceptualized properly. For example, the teacher's *with-it-ness*, the student's *paying attention*, or the child's *creativity* that is under scrutiny must be adequately conceptualized. So much, one hopes, is obvious. Less well understood is what proper conceptualization involves.

It does not involve simply giving examples (e.g., *a child looking intently at the teacher* is an example of paying attention). Giving examples, if that is all that is done, avoids the task of explaining why or in virtue of what they are examples. That means that the view of what counts as paying attention is never in fact fully articulated or explored and that we have no criteria whereby to recognize other examples. Nor does proper conceptualization amount simply to giving a dictionary definition in the sense of a verbal synonym, for a verbal synonym does not necessarily provide any greater understanding of the concept. (Defining *intelligence* as "mental ability," for instance, does not advance our understanding of intelligence at all, just as defining *existentialism* as "the view that existence precedes essence" is hardly illuminating to the uninitiated.)

Here it should perhaps be said that there is nothing necessarily objectionable about resorting to operational definitions or, more specifically, behavioural definitions. And indeed arguments about the legitimacy and value of such things in the abstract do not make a lot of sense. Whether a behavioural definition is acceptable depends not on general methodological theories but on the concepts in question. Whether it is reasonable to adopt any kind of operational definition depends partly on how the operational definition relates to what it is supposed to define and partly on the

urgency of conducting research and the lack of alternative means of proceeding. Happiness, for example, by its very nature as a state of mind, is not something that is adequately and fully characterized in behavioural terms, and one can conceive of objecting that it should not be an educational priority to mount research into children's happiness, given that we would be stuck with conducting the research on the basis of an imperfect definition (see further about this topic in Barrow, 1980).

But whatever may be said for or against the use of operational definitions in particular cases, two rather important points need to be stressed. First, an *operational definition*, as the very phrase implies, is not an adequate definition. It is an imperfect substitute for a definition; and we would do well to remember that, when we operationalize something such as paying attention in terms of "not looking out of the window," what we are in fact doing is conducting research into not looking out of the window rather than into paying attention. Second, there is no way of judging the quality of an operational definition, except in the light of a proper analysis of the concept in question. Whether not looking out of the window is a necessary condition, a sufficient condition, or a reasonably reliable index of paying attention could only be determined by somebody who was willing to do a proper analysis of the concept of paying attention. The use of operational definitions, therefore, does not in any case obviate the need for proper conceptual analysis.

Bona fide conceptualization involves articulating a full, clear, and coherent account of what constitutes being an instance of something. That is, it necessitates elaborating the criteria that have to be met if a person is legitimately to be described as happy, educated, or whatever; it requires explicit statement of the defining characteristics of the concept. This is not the place to go further in conceptualizing the concept of conceptualization itself. (The issue is taken up in most philosophy textbooks; see, for example, Barrow, 1981; Hospers, 1967.) Suffice it to say that, though it sounds easy, it is not well done in most educational research. (The degree of ease turns out to be a function of the concept in question rather than the business of analysis, of course.) But we cannot get around the need for any and every researcher to do this philosophical groundwork in the proper manner.

While we are on the general topic of conceptualization, it should be added that research must concern itself with relatively specific concepts, not because they are necessarily more clear than general concepts but because they are more informative. The problem with empirical inquiry into such broad concepts as effective teaching, effective schools, traditional as opposed to progressive styles of teaching, teacher withitness, group teaching, or children's creativity, is not that these concepts are necessarily unclear. There is no inherent reason why a broad concept such as *the traditional teacher* should not be very clear—far clearer than a relatively specific

concept such as *the talkative teacher*. After all, the broad concept of *a human being* can be more clearly articulated than the more specific concept of *a self-centred human being*. How clearly a concept can be articulated is a function of the complexity of the concept and our intellectual grasp of it, not of its relative breadth or specificity. The notion of self-centredness just is more hazy than that of a human being.

However, research that is centred on relatively general concepts necessarily leaves far more open to interpretation. There is no problem at all, in principle, about defining *traditional* and *progressive* clearly and finding a positive correlation between, say, traditional teaching and extensive pupil learning. The problem is that, because the concepts are so broad, we have enormous difficulty in getting practically useful information from the research: to be sure, traditional teachers seem to induce learning, but which of the many facets of this broad concept are actually having the presumed effect? That question matters because, again as a result of the breadth of the concept, few people are precisely “traditional” or “progressive” teachers, and it might well be that the “extensive learning” observed is largely the result of some particular element of what we have defined as “traditional” teaching that might very reasonably be incorporated as an element in what we otherwise classify as “progressive teaching.”

CONTENT

If research into such things as classroom management and effective teachers is to be illuminating, it must also, I would argue, pay more attention to the varying specific content with which particular teachers and groups of children have to deal. This is to some extent now being acknowledged by empirical researchers, and some are already looking into relatively circumscribed matters such as “the teaching of physics in Grade 10,” rather than into “the effective teacher” without qualification. But, by and large, this more narrowly focused interest seems to have come about through a growing awareness that the other, non-content-specific way was not revealing much rather than through a theoretical grasp of its greater potentiality.

In fact, the need to focus on particular content in research is largely a matter of logical necessity. The notion that there is a finite list of generalizable teaching skills (practices that any teacher ought always to engage in) and the corresponding view that the school curriculum should be conceived in terms of teaching students generalizable skills were always suspect, despite their popularity. The very meaning of the phrase *generalizable skill* is far from clear. Does it, for example, refer to a skill that may be used in a variety of different situations (as the skill of tying a knot may be), to a skill that may be employed for a variety of different purposes (as the skill

of clenching the fist may be), or to a skill that may serve various functions (as the skill of wielding a pen may do)? Is a generalizable skill essentially one that may be employed in a variety of different operations, one that has widespread utility, or one that is a necessary part of many activities? Then again, it can hardly be disputed that skills may be of very different kinds: the skill of analyzing concepts is clearly logically of a different order from the skill of making matchbox models, and what do either of them have in common with the skill of hairdressing or the skill of making friends? The uncritical use of the word also ignores the question of how one determines whether something should properly be seen as a skill or a set of subskills.

It is not, in short, at all clear whether teaching or desired student learning can be well or usefully characterized in terms of skills, but certainly this question could only be satisfactorily answered if prior conceptual work were done on the nature of and differences between such putative skills as keeping order, presenting material effectively, numeracy, stimulating understanding, creativity, and critical thinking. Research into skills to date, given that this philosophical groundwork has not been adequately done, must be somewhat empty. Research into critical thinking, to take a specific example, is vulnerable, despite its volume and repute, because so much of it has tended to proceed as if, though a mental skill, critical thinking were self-evidently on a logical par with a motor skill. That is implausible, not least because it seems a priori likely that thinking critically about, say, how to cope with practical problems in one's private life is quite distinct from critical thought related to the study of science. Even if we concede that any instance of someone's thinking critically will contain some elements that would be common to all others, the fact remains that one has to display one's critical thought in relation to some content. And no number of critical thinking skills will enable me to think critically about poetry or physics if I do not also thoroughly understand poetry and physics.

As far as teaching goes, it is very much an open question as to whether there are many skills that are, at one and the same time, applicable to all teachers, of considerable importance, and in need of being learned. I do not count here rules of teaching that, though they may be called empirical, are in fact logically necessary truths, such as "if children are to understand what you intend them to understand, you must explain what you want understood precisely and clearly." I am concerned with truly empirical claims, such as "spend five minutes at the beginning of a lesson recapitulating" or "explain in advance what your objectives are." If these have any validity at all, it is only as rules of thumb: they are not laws that one breaks at one's peril, and anyway, they won't take one far, since the difficult questions are how to do these things effectively and what else to do. Of course, much research into teaching has taken place at the elementary level, which distorts our understanding of this issue, since *prima facie* there are certain basic skills to

which young children should be introduced, and at this level the particular content may arguably be relatively unimportant. But secondary teachers, at any rate, and to some extent elementary teachers, are teachers of specific subject matter (English, biology, social studies, history, or whatever), and plainly what makes a good teacher of English for 13-year-olds is not necessarily what makes a good teacher of biology for 18-year-olds because the subject matter and the varying purposes for teaching different things at different levels themselves make demands on how the teacher should proceed.

Research into teaching, therefore, if it is to be coherent, must be able to articulate the nature of the content involved and the presumed rationale for teaching it. How could one conceivably pick out a good history teacher without any understanding of what history is and why one should wish to teach it at a particular stage?

TECHNICAL QUALITIES

As far as technical matters go, some are indeed important for the coherence of the research enterprise as a whole. I would draw attention to three in particular: the need for larger samples, the need for truly random samples, and the need for more longitudinal studies. Since I imagine most empirical researchers will agree on those as ideals, I will say no more about them here.

But validity and reliability, on which so much emphasis is placed, are of relatively little consequence. Coherence and consistency between instruments and between researchers in varying conditions are of course requisite, provided that the instruments and researchers are to be trusted. But whether they are to be trusted—trusted to get at the truth—is not a function of high validity and reliability ratings. It is a function of the appropriateness of the *manner of research* to the *matter being researched*; and that, once again, is largely determined by a proper analysis of the concepts involved. Most creativity tests are poor simply because, in testing things such as people's ability to think of uses for a brick, to make pictures out of circles, or to provide titles for short stories, they are not dealing with anything that resembles our complex notion of a truly creative individual. They are testing our ability to think of uses for bricks and so on, the educational (or indeed any other) value of which has never been argued for or demonstrated, and in the view of many of those who have given thought to the notion of educational value, somewhat strains credibility.

Objectivity in the sense of freedom from personal bias or whim is also requisite, but this should not be confused with *objective* in the sense of *systematic*. As to the popular question of whether systematic forms of research such as interaction analysis are to be preferred to more informal ethnographic modes, this seems to me something of a red herring. There are undoubtedly problems with both types of research (acknowledged by researchers),

but the question is not which methodology is best in the abstract but what you are researching. Some things lend themselves to observation in terms of very specific prespecified behaviours and others do not. Yet the question of which do and which do not is seldom considered by those engaged in empirical research, no doubt partly because it can only be answered by those who are prepared to do the conceptual groundwork thoroughly.

Certainly there is nothing necessarily more objective (in the sense of being beyond contamination by the researchers' viewpoint) about formal or quantitative as opposed to informal or qualitative research. The fact that a prespecified and/or strictly quantifiable mode of observation is employed at best merely shifts the source of possible subjectivity to the design of the observation schedule and away from the moment of observation. (As a matter of fact it cannot entirely remove chances of the latter as well since the observer still has to make particular judgments about how to categorize behaviour.) But, in any case, the question of objectivity should be secondary to the question of the appropriateness of an observation method for getting at the truth of what is going on in particular situations.

Research must obviously be limited to those situations where we have a reasonable control of variables. At the moment, it is too easy to snipe at individual pieces of research, pointing out variables that have not been thought of, much less controlled for. For example, Bennett's (1984) research into teaching methods in primary schools did not take account of differences in the home backgrounds of students, attitudes of parents, social class of students, qualities of the school, quality and experience of teachers, reading and math schemes employed by schools, or aims of teachers. But surely it is the empirical researchers' job to make sure that they are researching something where the potential variables are known and controllable.

I would suggest that someone might usefully prepare an index of all the variables that have been researched in sociology and psychology at one time or another, as well as in the more amorphous category of classroom studies, along with any others we can think of. Respectable research would then be required to consider that list and to come up with a design that takes account of all that might seem to be relevant. But the immediate point is that the worth of a piece of research, as far as variables are concerned, is not to be judged by the skilful means whereby variables are controlled, which is a matter of technical expertise, but by the extent to which all relevant variables are taken account of. That is an imaginative rather than a technical task, and one that presupposes a rich and sophisticated conceptual grasp of the educational enterprise.

CONCLUSION

By way of summary, I shall take seven points out of the previous sections and rearrange their order slightly. If educational research is to deserve to be taken seriously, then

1. researchers must understand what true conceptual analysis involves. In particular, they must not confuse it with mere synonyms or the giving of examples;
2. whatever their personal area of interest, they must all show concern for conceptualizing the context—the nature of the educational enterprise—adequately;
3. empirical researchers must, in addition, properly conceptualize what they intend to look at. If there are compelling reasons to operationalize a concept, then it must be clearly pointed out that the research is actually not into x , but into something else that has a bearing on x . The nature of the bearing on x needs to be explained by articulating the relationship between the operational definition and a fully articulated account of the concept;
4. the methodology adopted must be chosen in the light of the concepts being researched rather than by some ideological commitment to a style of research;
5. an imaginative attempt must be made to consider all possible variables that might come into play. Researchers should regard it as part of their job to draw attention to everything that might be relevant which is not being controlled;
6. research must concentrate on relatively specific concepts;
7. research into teaching must take full account of the nature and purpose of teaching different contents.

In the discussion that followed the original presentation of this paper, and that developed during the remainder of the conference, certain points were made that, in conclusion, I should like to comment on briefly. One misunderstanding was that I am calling for the policing of empirical research by philosophers. That is not in fact so. I am calling for the centrality of a philosophical dimension to empirical research to be recognized and to be competently addressed. It is not of immediate interest to me whether this is done by creating teams of philosophers and empiricists or by enabling empiricists to do it themselves. If I had to state a preference, I would say that in the long term I marginally incline to the latter, a situation in which educational researchers add to their undoubted technical ability and sophistication a greater philosophical acumen and a more broadly based conception of the educational enterprise. The real problem at present, as I see it and judging from the view—expressed more than once—that my seven points are obvious and uncontentious, is that it takes a philosophical mind to see that, however self-evident they may be, most empirical research fails to meet all seven demands satisfactorily. I suspect that what is most urgently needed is a thorough study of the nature of conceptual analysis in general and the central concepts of education is particular by those whose own education has been largely confined to other disciplines and modes of research.

A large part of the conference was taken up with argument about the extent to which a paradigm of research taken from the natural sciences is appropriate for educational research. Although I have views on this matter, I hope it is clear that in this paper I do not wish to present them. How many of the issues that we would ideally like to research in education can in fact be profitably researched meeting my seven prescriptions, and which of them can be well approached systematically, by informal observation techniques, by survey, by experimental research, by quasi-experimental research, and so on, are not questions to which we yet have answers. My concern is that researchers should only proceed if they can come up with a research design that is not vulnerable on any of the seven counts listed.

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Der Autor tritt ein für die Bedeutung tiefgehender philosophischer Betrachtungen für die empirische Forschung in den Erziehungswissenschaften. Ohne eine klare und verständliche Konzeptualisierung des Kontexts in der Forschung—in diesem Fall die erzieherische Aufgabe—kann die Eignung eines bestimmtem Aspekts der Forschung nicht bewertet werden. Wir benötigen einen zufriedenstellend artikulierten Grundstock von Schlüsselkonzepten in den Erziehungswissenschaften. Außerdem müssen die Konzepte, auf die die Forschung sich konzentriert, zur Zufriedenheit artikuliert werden, und der jeweilige mögliche Inhalt muß als Schlüssel-Variable angesehen werden. Die Arbeit trägt zur Erhellung dessen bei, was mit befriedigender Konzeptualisierung verbunden ist.

El autor aboga por la importancia del buen filosofar en la investigación empírica en educación. Sin un concepto claro y coherente del contexto de la investigación—en este caso la empresa de educación—no se puede evaluar lo apropiado de una investigación en particular. Lo que necesitamos es un núcleo de conceptos claves en educación, articulados de manera satisfactoria. Además, los conceptos sobre los que se vuelca la investigación también deben de estar bien articulado, y el tema preciso de que se trata debe de considerarse como una variable clave. Esta investigación contribuye a elucidar qué es lo que entraña una conceptualización satisfactoria.

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