University of St.Gallen
Institute of Business Education
and Educational Management

Rediscovering Education's Relative Autonomy: Reflections on the Discipline's Past, Present, and Future

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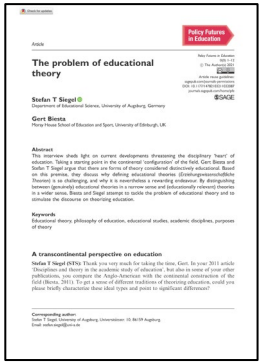
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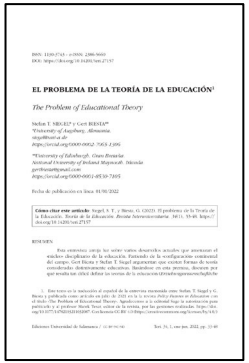
From insight to impact

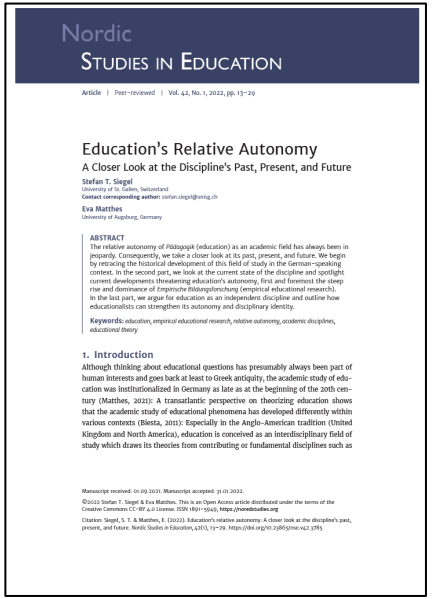
Basis for This Talk





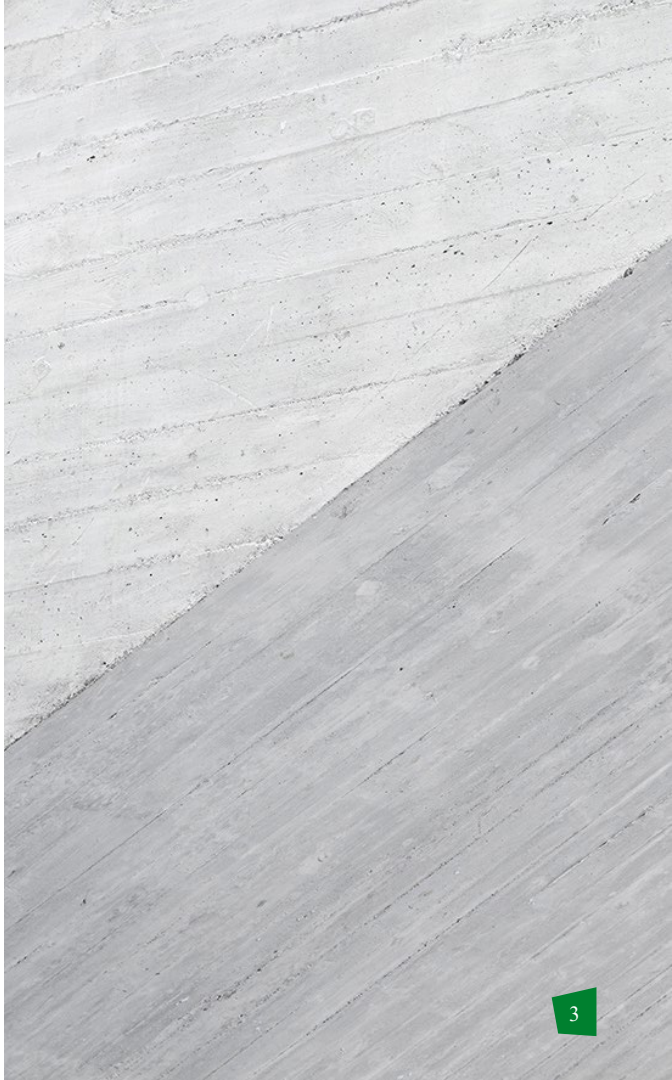






Agenda

1. What is Education (as an Academic Discipline)?
2. What is Education’s Relative Autonomy?
3. How to Safeguard Education’s Relative Autonomy



I. What is Education (as an Academic Discipline)?

Theorising Education: A Transatlantic Perspective

(e.g., Biesta, 2011; Matthes, 2020; Siegel & Biesta, 2021; Sæverot, 2021)

Anglo-American Construction

- dominant view in the UK and the USA
- education = interdisciplinary field of study
- dependent on theoretical input from 'contributing' (Tibble 1966, p. vii) or 'fundamental' (Hirst 1966, p. 57) disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology)

Continental Construction

- German-speaking context, but also some other countries
- education = discipline in its own right with genuine interests, questions, terms, and theories
- a place for other disciplines, but as auxiliary

Historical Development of Pädagogik/Erziehungswissenschaft – Some Milestones

- „Aufklärungspädagogen“ claim education‘s autonomy (e.g., Trapp, 1977)
- Herbart and the Herbartians continue the fight for *Pädagogik* as an independent discipline (Herbart, 1806/1982; Matthes, 2021)
- Principle of the relative autonomy of education = one of the central topics in paradigm *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* (Matthes, 2020)
- Since the 1960s: profound processes of expansion, differentiation, and specialization (Krüger, 2019; Matthes, 2021)

What defines the the Academic Discipline Pädagogik/*Erziehungswissenschaft*?

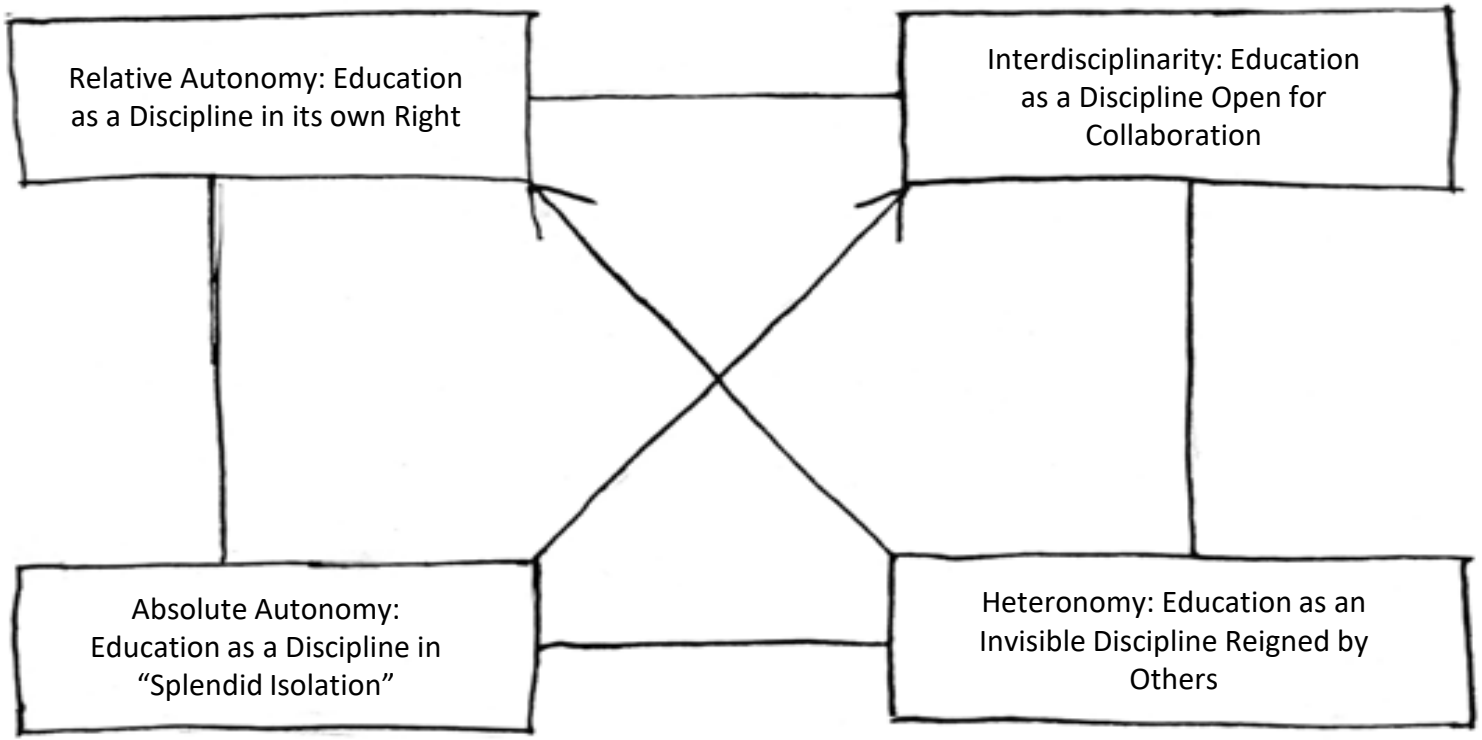
(e.g., Kagan, 2009; Ruhloff, 2006; Vogel, 2016; Krüger, 2019)

- **Primary characteristics** (e.g., objects of research, genuine theories, and concepts) vs. **secondary characteristics** (e.g., departments, journals, conferences) (e.g., Vogel, 2016)

- *Pädagogik/Erziehungswissenschaft* appears to be a "very normal" and even successful discipline (Abs et al., 2020; Koller et al., 2016; Prange, 2005; Vogel, 2016)

II. What is Education's Relative Autonomy (and Why is it in Danger)?

What is Education's Relative Autonomy?



(Weniger, 1990; Schulz von Thun, 2014; Siegel & Biesta, 2021; Siegel & Matthes, 2022)

What is Threatening Education‘s Relative Autonomy?

- ‘native concepts‘ (Herbart, 1806, p. 12) or ‘primary characteristics‘ (Vogel, 2016, p. 461), however,
  - … neglected in educational literature and discourses
  - … no consensus on a definition (Nieke, 2006; Siegel & Daumiller, 2021)

→ Theoretical deficits alias “the problem of educational theory” (Siegel & Biesta, 2021, p. 6) + enormous willingness of educators to import concepts and theories from other disciplines (Prange, 2012) makes it easier for them to “invade” (Saeverot, 2021, p. 115) *Pädagogik*

III. How to Safeguard Education's Relative Autonomy

«Education is autonomous and should be free to determine its own ends, its own objectives»

(Dewey, 1929, p. 8)

Safeguarding Education's Relative Autonomy: Some Propositions

To maintain and strengthen the relative autonomy of *Pädagogik/Erziehungswissenschaft*, educationists …

Proposition 1: … first of all, need to ask educational questions and dedicate themselves more to understanding and theorizing the phenomenon of *Erziehung* (education).

Proposition 2: … secondly, need to increasingly (further) develop (already existing) distinctively educational theories.

Proposition 3: … need to engage in better border control.

Proposition 4: … need to use empirical and non-empirical methods to comprehensively understand the phenomena of *Erziehung* und *Bildung*.

(Siegel & Matthes, 2022)

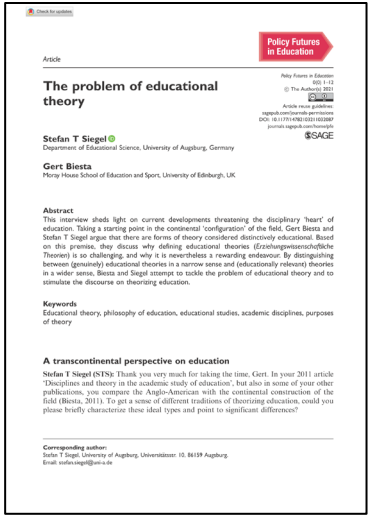
A Closer Look at Proposition 1

- "It occasionally seems to me that we educators are embarrassed to speak clearly, directly, and emphatically of education, as if it were something for which we had to apologize and which, at best, we were still allowed to do to young children, but otherwise have to conceal, rewrite, and semantically circumvent" (Prange, 2005, p. 19)

- *But:* educationists should cultivate their basic concepts (Herbart, 1806/1982) instead of replacing them with terms from other disciplines (Loch, 2019; Prange, 2012)

A Closer Look at Proposition 2

- Erziehungswissenschaftliche Theorien = scarcely and rather ill-defined term in the German-speaking context (e.g., Meseth und Lüders, 2018)
- potentials of defining educational theories: more clarity in discourses | stronger disciplinary identity
- →defining educational theories = challenging & rewarding endeavor (Siegel, 2022; Siegel & Biesta, 2021)



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SAGE

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Abstract
This interview sheds light on current developments threatening the disciplinary 'heart' of education. Taking a starting point in the continental 'configuration' of the field, Gert Biesta and Stefan T Siegel argue that there are forms of theory considered distinctively educational. Based on this premise, they discuss why defining educational theories (*Erziehungswissenschaftliche Theorien*) is so challenging, and why it is nevertheless a rewarding endeavour. By distinguishing between (genuinely) educational theories in a narrow sense and (educationally relevant) theories in a wider sense, Biesta and Siegel attempt to tackle the problem of educational theory and to stimulate the discourse on theorizing education.

Keywords
Educational theory, philosophy of education, educational studies, academic disciplines, purposes of theory

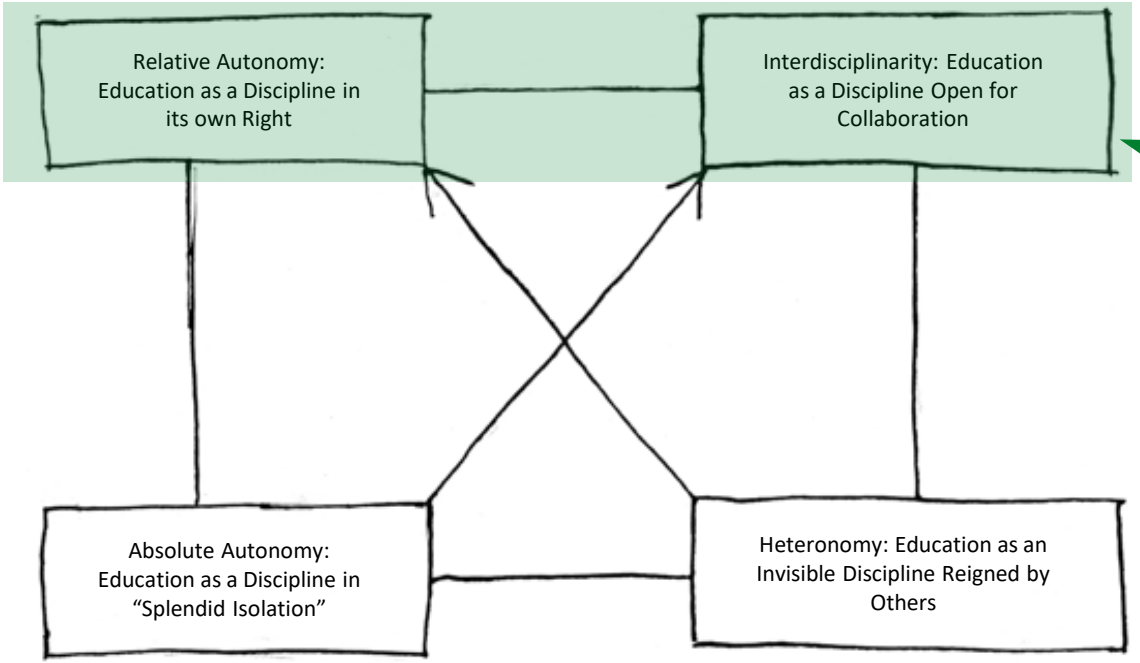
A transcontinental perspective on education

Stefan T Siegel (STS): Thank you very much for taking the time, Gert. In your 2011 article 'Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education', but also in some of your other publications, you compare the Anglo-American with the continental construction of the field (Biesta, 2011). To get a sense of different traditions of theorizing education, could you please briefly characterize these ideal types and point to significant differences?

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IV. Conclusion and Perspective

Speaking for Education's Relative Autonomy



"structural interest in and activism for education's autonomy" (Yosef-Hassidim & Baldacchino, 2021, p. 51)

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