



Photo by Kimberly Farmer on Unsplash

ABSTRACT

What is lost when the research-informed testimony of philosophers of education is side-lined and their work interpretatively silenced, dismissed, undervalued or excluded? And how do such exclusionary practices impact on the acquisition, transmission, production, and scrutinization of knowledge claims at the heart of teacher education? Irrespective of our response to these questions, paradigmatic cases of testimonial injustice such as this invite us to think carefully about what we, that is, philosophers of education, help foster and value, be it, sense-making, emancipation, flourishing, wisdom, *Bildung*, *Verstehen*, reflective practice, avoiding harms, decolonising curricula, ameliorating epistemic injustice, cultivating pedagogical tact, dialectical journeying, reason-attuned socio-critical communities of practices, listener-learner sensibilities, ethics of care, criticality, imagination, subjectively-spiralled meaning-making and so on. This paper responds to pre-service teachers' allegations of epistemic trespassing, identifying them as a form of identity prejudice that leads to testimonial injustice.

KEYWORDS

testimonial injustice;
debunking education as
science narratives; epistemic
trespassing

Understanding testimonial injustice

But first, what is testimonial injustice? In short, it is a specific type of injustice which occurs in cases where you say something, and are not believed, or at the very least, a negligible credence affixed to your words because your hearer betrays a deep-seated prejudice about people like you (Fricker, 2007). Such prejudice, where instantiated, reduces you to the status of a sub-knower, a type of non-credible knowledge claimant. Despite the specific label, the speech act in which this word is expressed need not be strictly that of testimony or telling, but might equally be the airing of a question, an opinion, suggestion, point of clarification, critique, alternative conception or relevant possibility.

Why this matters

All very interesting of course, you might say, but why does this matter? And more importantly, why should it matter to philosophers of education? First, I think it's important because it captures the

exclusionary practice which locks philosophers of education working in initial teacher education programmes out of knowledge production and meaning-making. Such marginalization might be partly explained by the fact that, on occasion, pre-service teachers (and colleagues outside our discipline) betray a tendency to underestimate or wilfully misinterpret the importance of practitioner-centred, theory-testing-praxis triads. Akin to music theory teachers who cannot, or have not played an instrument in a very long time, our testimony, what we have to offer and enrich the field of education, is routinely downplayed or dismissed. Now... this hurts. It hurts since we are relegated to the role of audience member instead of music-maker. We are marginalized. All we are fit for now is teaching turgid theory. Nothing more. Our informed testimonial insights about education, not just that which goes on within a classroom, falls on deaf ears. We are people who *talk* about teaching and learning. We are not doers; we are not teachers—we are merely out-of-tune, failed pedagogues—the purveyors of emancipatory dissonance.

Challenging education as science narratives

To philosophers of education, some of us might feel that pre-service teachers view education as a science. On this view, teaching is a matter of following fixed rules in order to reach a series of predetermined learning outcomes. The process is all that matters. Forget a deep understanding of human beings at the centre of the educational experience. Follow the rules to the letter and you'll be a successful teacher. Teaching and learning are simply recipes. Measure the ingredients correctly, follow the recipe, and voilà! Many of us attempt to counter this prevailing view (Dunne, 2024). We look at the values embedded in education. We try to unpack how educational systems mirror societal inequalities. We ask why. We seek a reasoned account as to why emancipatory theories of education are central to the struggle to become a better human being. We look beyond the formal curriculum. We try to show the value of the human curriculum. Occasionally we air our frustrations about how no amount of pedagogical wizardry, reflective analysis or know-how/that reductionism, will transform a technocrat into a *phronimos*. We try. We fail. We try again. We fail again. We strive to fail better.

So, how might philosophers of education respond to the accusation of epistemic trespassing? To what extent do we as purported 'experts in one field' (philosophy of education), pronounce judgment on another (teaching and learning) without a sufficient grasp or understanding either of the relevant evidence germane to that domain or the requisite skills to interpret the evidence? (Ballantyne, 2019). How might we address such a charge in the modern university? How do we show teachers that students come to school with more than the bag on their backs? How do we prove that there is no such thing as a value-neutral education? How do we move beyond identity prejudices toward truth-tracking, shared understandings?

Concluding remarks

Philosophers of education play a vital role in fostering deeper understandings of the nature, source and scope of educational practices, goals and professional identities of all those who seek to embed themselves in ongoing critical conversations (Oakshott, 1971) central to education. By challenging testimonial injustice, by pushing back against hermeneutical silencing and the charge of epistemic trespassing, they can ensure their contributions are recognized and given due credence and value in individually and collectively shaping the future of education.

Notes on contributor

Gerry Dunne is a lecturer in philosophy of education at Marino Institute of Education. He is also a research fellow in Trinity College Dublin. Most of his research focuses on epistemological matters in education. To this end, he has published internationally in the area of critical thinking, empathy, decolonisation, exemplarism; initial

teacher education, epistemic injustice and epistemic exploitation. He welcomes collaborations with like-minded scholars.

ORCID

Gerry Dunne  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0137-8027>

References

- Ballantyne, N. (2019). Epistemic trespassing. *Mind*, 128(510), 367-395. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzy051>
- Dunne, G. (2024). Deliberate ignorance and myopic intellectualist understandings of expertise: Are philosophers of education epistemic trespassers in initial teacher education programmes? *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-024-09939-2>
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001>
- Oakeshott, M. (1971). Education: The engagement and its frustration. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 5(1), 43-76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.1971.tb00448.x>