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Start Here, Or Here, No Here: Introductions to Rethinking Education Policy and Methodology in a Post-Truth Era

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Abstract: This special issue takes up urgent questions about how we education scholars might think and do policy and methodology in what has come to be known as the post-truth era. The authors in this special issue grapple with questions about the roles and responsibilities of educational researchers in an era in which research and policy have lost their moorings in T/truth. Collectively they reconceptualize educational research and policy in light of post-truths, anti-science sentiment, and the global rise of right-wing populism. At the same time we editors wonder whether post-truth is given a bad rap. Could post-truth have something productive to offer? What does post-truth open up for educational research and policy? Or, is the real issue of this special issue a collective despair of our own insignificance and obsolescence in the wake of post-truth. Whatever we editors and authors aimed to do, this special issue will not be heard by post-truth adherents and partisans. Perhaps its only contribution is encouragement to stay with the troubles of a post-truth era, even as we despair the consequences of our research and policy creations.

Keywords: post-truth; methodology; education policy; fake news

Comience aquí, o aquí, no aquí: Introducciones para repensar la política y metodología educativa en una era posverdad

Resumen: Este número especial plantea preguntas urgentes sobre cómo los académicos de la educación pueden pensar y hacer políticas y metodologías en una era posverdad. Los autores se enfrentan a preguntas sobre los roles y responsabilidades de los investigadores educativos en un momento en que la investigación y la política han perdido sus amarres en V/verdad. En conjunto, reconceptualizan la investigación y la política educativa a la luz de las posverdades, el sentimiento anticientífico y el auge mundial del populismo de derecha. Los editores también se preguntan si a la posverdad se le da una mala reputación. ¿Podría la posverdad tener algo productivo que ofrecer? ¿Qué abre la posverdad a la investigación y la política educativa? O bien, ¿es el problema real de este número especial una desesperación colectiva de nuestra propia insignificancia y obsolescencia después de la posverdad? Independientemente de lo que nosotros (los editores y autores) pretendamos hacer, este número especial no será escuchado por los partidarios y partidarios de la posverdad. Quizás su única contribución sea un estímulo para permanecer con los problemas de una era posverdad, incluso cuando nos desesperamos por las consecuencias de nuestras investigaciones y creaciones de políticas.

Palabras-clave: posverdad; metodología; política educativa; noticias falsas

Comience aquí, o aquí, no aquí: Introduções para repensar a política e a metodologia educativa em uma era pós-verdad

Resumo: Esta dossiê especial levanta questões urgentes sobre como os estudiosos da educação podem pensar e fazer políticas e metodologias em uma era pós-verdade. Os autores se deparam com questões sobre os papéis e responsabilidades dos pesquisadores educacionais em um momento em que a pesquisa e a política perderam seus laços na verdade. Juntos, eles reconceitualizam a pesquisa e a política educacional à luz das verdades posteriores, do sentimento anti-científico e da ascensão mundial do populismo de direita. Os editores também se perguntam se a verdade posterior recebe uma má reputação. A pós-verdade poderia ter algo produtivo para oferecer? O que abre a verdade depois da pesquisa e da política educacional? Ou o verdadeiro problema desta questão especial é um desespero coletivo de nossa própria insignificância e obsolescência depois da verdade posterior? Independentemente do que nós (editores e autores) pretendemos fazer, esta edição especial não será ouvida pelos apoiadores e apoiadores da verdade posterior. Talvez sua única contribuição seja um incentivo para permanecer com os problemas de uma era pós-verdade, mesmo quando nos desesperamos com as conseqüências de nossa pesquisa e elaboração de políticas.

Palavras-chave: pós-verdad; metodología; política educativa; noticias falsas

Start Here, Or Here, No Here: Introductions to Rethinking Education Policy and Methodology in a Post-Truth Era

Introduction X

This special issue takes up urgent questions about how we education scholars might think and do policy and methodology in what has come to be known as the *post-truth* era. Collectively and individually, the articles in this special issue grapple with pressing, puzzling, and intractable questions about the role(s), responsibilities, and value(s) of educational research(ers) in the ongoing era of what has been formally called post-truth (*Oxford Dictionaries*' word of the year for 2016), which the publisher defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

As editors, we draw the readers' attention to three overarching and intertwined provocations that serve as starting points for rethinking education policy and methodology in a post-truth era. First, in a post-truth era, *many* research epistemologies, ontologies, processes, and policy discourses have lost their moorings in T/truth. This unsettling of T/truth, amidst continuously shifting and unstable intersections between policy and methodology, generates both challenges and opportunities for scholars to rethink the purpose and value of their works.

Second, the Trump administration's election and policy (un)making might mark an unprecedented time in U.S. and global history in which scientists, including educational researchers, must rethink the political ethics of their scholarly works. They might ask: Should I become an activist for science and science policy? How could an activist scientist or politically passionate scholar function and act? What role(s) should scientists and research (now) play in educating a civil society and informing policy? How has the Trump election and current world politics urged educational researchers to rethink methodologies, designs, methods, agendas, and the overarching political ethics of research?

Third, perhaps we are now fully in the ruins of scientifically based research (SBR) in education (Lather, 2013). If the election of Trump was a referendum (Klein, 2016) against centrist liberals and their support for neoliberal policies in education (e.g., SBR, standardized testing, value added modeling), then scholars may (again) question the role SBR can or should play in education policy-making. Do educational researchers unite under a common arch to advocate for (a return to) SBR or something else not possible or thinkable before the era of post-truths? What new political and research dilemmas do educational researchers face and how do they position themselves and their scholarship for an uncertain political future? What (new) spaces have opened up for them and what has closed down? What might educational researchers fight for?

This special issue includes seven authors' reflections on these and other questions of policy and methodology in a post-truth era. We organized the articles in a loose progression of the authors' positioning of post-truth and T/truth. Specifically, we begin with articles that discuss post-truth in a mostly negative light and call on educational researchers to take up methodologies and approaches that reveal the ills of post-truth and illuminate T/truths. We end with articles that avoid accounts of post-truth as solely bad and value methodological and political approaches that continue to question and undermine our sense of T/truth. Each article offers an insightful analysis and/or (re)conceptualization of educational research and policy in light of post-truths, anti-science sentiment, and the global rise of right-wing populism.

Joshua Childs and Sarah Jessica Johnson begin the special issue with an outright rejection of the activism-research divide. They argue that in a post-truth era that gives equal credence to racist, sexist, homophobic, etc...discourses, it is more vital than ever to conduct critical research that centers the voices of people of color and others at the margins in order to speak truth-to-power.

Chris Bacon similarly argues that critical literacies are essential to combatting post-truth discourses. He notes, however, that critical literacies and post-truth discourses share common features and discusses the "first wave" critical literacy responses to post-truth that risk emboldening post-truth instead of dismantling it. He urges critical literacy scholars to renew the "critical" in critical literacies.

Rubén Arriazu also sees critical literacy/thinking as a way to combat the ills of post-truth. Illustrating a "hermeneutic methodology of suspicion" to critique two opposing Internet accounts of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in France, he reveals how the Internet is a catalyst for multiple-truths. At the same time, Arriazu notes the potential of Internet accounts when viewed through suspicious eyes to resist mainstream, normative, and privileged "truths" of events.

Rachel E. Friedensen and Ezekiel Kimball, in contrast to the critical approaches advocated in the first three articles, draw on Rortian pragmatism to argue that "utility," instead of objective truth, should be the standard for evaluating expert judgement under attack by conservative antiintellectualism. Embracing the axiom that expert judgement always conflates facts and values, they argue objective truth is an unrealistic and unobtainable ideal and, therefore, should be abandoned as a frame for discussing research quality in higher education.

Jessica Van Cleave also contextualizes her work in light of anti-intellectualism and assaults on expertise and evidence. Rather than advance a resistance, she illuminates the dangers and risks of an "overzealous scientism" backlash by reminding us of SBR's not-so-distant dominance. She wonders about the "science" that is advocated for in movements like the March for Science and warns us against uniting (again) under a restrictive account of "science." She calls on scholars who seek to counter forces of anti-intellectualism, to continue to undermine the "truths" of science, asking what science and for whom?

James Burns, Colin Green, and Jaime Nolan also take up the questions about the truths of concepts in the post-truth era. They advance Foucauldian genealogy and *parrhēsia*, or truth-telling, to understand post-truth as emerging in public relations and propaganda discourses in the early 20th century. They argue that genealogical and truth-telling methodologies together frame a new ethics of adversarial public scholarship, necessary to understand the academy's role in subverting and perpetuating power in the so-called post-truth era.

Ryan Gildersleeve ends the special issue by bringing together the contexts and concepts of the Anthropocene and post-truth to rethink education policy and methodology in light of critiques of higher education policies on undocumented students. His analysis offers educationalists "plausible postures"—or ethical frames—for thinking education policy and methodology that speak to the need for speculation and radical decentering of the human and what constitutes human truths. Collectively, these articles offer educational scholars much to reconsider as we struggle with important questions about how, whether, and why educational research can and should speak to policy in the post-truth era.

Introduction X and Y

This special issue takes up (or does it?) urgent questions about how we education scholars (and citizens, immigrants, mothers, fathers, resisters, supporters and more) might think and do (non)policy and anti/post/un-methodology in what has come to be known, felt, sensed, and lived as the post-truth era. Collectively and individually, these articles, thoughts, senses, affects, and matterings grapple with pressing, puzzling, and intractable questions about the role(s), responsibilities, and value(s) of educational research(ers) in the ongoing (past, present, becoming) era of post-truths.

In general, post-truth has been perceived as a negative phenomenon, something that scholars must deny, correct, and work against. However, alternative truth practices and positionings might also have something interesting to offer. What if one considers post-truth to function as a productive movement and constructive space: a space for infinite and acknowledged difference, becoming, and fruitful questioning? It could be argued that current critical societal discourses, alternative forms of social media, and diverse and liminal opinions of the public have finally caught up with postmodernisms and multiplicity of partial and fragmented knowledges (see also Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018). In many modern societies and in these times of overproduced "realities," citizens and scholars are faced with a need to learn to live with uncertainty of knowledge, situated truths, and multiplicity of information of all kinds. It is possible that news, knowledge structures, and truths can no longer be traced back to signifier-signified linkages or their origins. Instead, this kind of knowledge could produce desirable differences and otherness. However, it might also question, fail, and possibly disappoint. Additionally, in the times of post-truth, knowledge can be both accurate and inaccurate, narratives sincere and falsified, and drawn conclusions factual as well as fictional. Truth can no longer hide behind academic claims and writing, power, or rely on political connections, lobbyists, or any kind of "validated" information delivery. The relationship among truth, science, and academia might also become problematized. Derrida's immanent and endless aporia could as well characterize today's state of knowledge, truths, news, and information regardless of the context and assumed stable truth conditions. Knowledge and information of all kinds might take new and unexpected turns where language is likely to continue to reinvent itself, its discourses, and its practices.

Post-truth in its fragmented, problematizing, fake, and non-signifying forms has inspired scholars from Nietzsche and Derrida to Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze, and others to reconceptualize assumed normativity, causality, absolute truth-value, will to power, knowledge, validity, and more. Fabricated subjects, non-subjects, virtual, becoming, relational, material and discursive subjects (both human and non-human) have generated non-stories, counter narratives, hyperreal theories, overly reproduced relations, knowledges and information linkages independent from stable knower and verifiable object formations. Without stable speaking and knowing subjects, truths are also continuously being transformed, changed, and circulated. Un-knowing and uncertain proxy, almost, "nearly there" subjects are asked to make decisions in the face of aporia and the undecidable (see Derrida, 1993), while knowledges problematize their own practices and structures at their own pace. Critical techniques, alternative technologies, spaces of deconstruction, linguistic and ontological turns, and ontologies of difference can possibly enable post-truth individuals and proxy subjects to process inconsistencies and insufficiencies in their lives, language, concepts, theories, and practices. However, the value of knowledges likely continues to become even more situational and context dependent and, as such, increasingly contested, invalidated, contradicted, and problematized with each new relational turn and emerging sociocultural situation.

Massumi (2015) referred to societies as open fields of thresholds and gateways where enclosures, walls, and rigid structures no longer suffice. From this perspective, truth and knowledge structures might function as checkpoints, crossing lines, and potentially internally contradictory assemblages. Drawing from Deleuze, Massumi encourages communities (and scholars) to find a way to believe in the world again. We need to "experience our belonging to this world, which is the same thing as our belonging to each other, and live that so intensely together that there is no room to doubt the reality of it" (p. 45). Massumi continues that the political question is not to impose solutions or find resolutions [to the truth question] but to explore how to keep the intensity in that which comes next and continues to differentiate. This position could also imply that complexity of truth and knowledges would not be a problem but an ecological starting point. Goodman (2018) reminds us that speculative affirmation could work as a technique not to confirm normative possibilities for relating and thinking-doing but to linger with experimenting freely. What if truth(s) are defined by what (e)scapes them? What if truth(s) are lived by/through the events of potentiality, ecological differentiation, and relationality?

Introduction X, Y, and Z

What is the purpose of this special issue? This special issue, for whatever it purports to do, for whatever the editors and authors stated they were doing, will not be heard by post-truth adherents and partisans. Fake news! (Trump, 2016). The call for this special issue was germinated in the overwhelming affects of disbelief and anger following the 2016 elections. Disbelief eroded over time, but the anger is renewed daily by the continuing horrors of a world cloaked by "fake news" and post-truth. That anger bled into our research accompanied by nihilism and perhaps something more—perhaps a sense of the oncoming dread of the price of post-truth now and in the future, here in academe and elsewhere. Post-truth drives at the heart of scholarship, research, and the multiplicities of truth we once knew. What remains of truth is uncertain and what to do in response is even less clear. Scholarship did not get "us" into post-truth. How can scholarship get us out?

Maybe our real issue is the revelation of our own seeming insignificance and oncoming obsolescence in the wake of post-truth. That academics are just playing catch-up rather than driving thought. Perhaps this special issue is just a collective delusion—a *folie à deux* (Trump, 2018) between us the writers and you the readers—that we can only look to ourselves for reassurance. What is the place of this special issue then? Of research? Of policy research? Is this academic group therapy?

Are we just sore that Donald Trump, of all people, and his ilk did what decades of scholarship could not do: herald the death of truth—to bring us to the place where "fake news" (Trump, 2016) and "reality" contend for supremacy? Scholars have long argued that the Truth, truth, T/truth, truth was multiple. Is post-truth multiple? What is the cost of making common cause with post-truth when it is attended by racism, nativism, anti-intellectualism, and perhaps more horrors to come? Would the scholar class, assuredly the only ones reading this, pay that cost? How much of it? We sought the death of truth to liberate. Trump uses post-truth to oppress. What is "good" research now? Not simply what makes research good to us, but does research not aimed at stemming the post-truth tide no longer have value? Is this special issue "good" research? What are the ethics of my/your/our research now? Or perhaps we should do nothing and continue, little swayed.

Not all are so concerned about post-truth—that nihilism, anger, and disbelief occludes the possibilities of post-truth. That post-truth, as a force of liberation, transcends or, perhaps, undercuts the vicissitudes of daily life. That the amorphous post-truth is kin (Haraway, 2016) to the post-structuralist/modernist/humanist/qualitativist. No one would claim that the violence, hate, and

vitriol was worth the price of post-truth, but scholars are left with the monumental task of both defending science while also asking what can be mobilized in the aftermath of post-truth. Can this be done? Can what we do next be undone? What assurances can we offer to policy studies, methodologies, and academic research? Can they be preserved in the penumbra of post-truth and our reactions to/with it? Are we even asking the right questions? The Jefferson Kroger shooter, the #MAGAbomber, and Pittsburgh synagogue shooter were all caught the week we composed this introduction. The November 6 election loomed. What remains of truth is uncertain and what to do in response is even less clear.

Perhaps, if it can be said to affect anything at all, this special issue will provide readers with encouragement to "stay with" the troubles of a post-truth era, to continue to live and think—create —even as we despair the consequences of our creations (Haraway, 2016).

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