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Citation: A. C. Nikolaidis, "Epistemic Injustice in Education: Exploring Structural Approaches, Envisioning Structural Remedies," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 57, no. 4-5 (2023): 842–861.

Epistemic Injustice in Education: Exploring Structural Approaches, Envisioning Structural Remedies

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ABSTRACT: Since the publication of Miranda Fricker's seminal book *Epistemic Injustice*, philosophy of education scholarship has been mostly limited to analyses of culprit-based epistemic injustice in education. This has left structural manifestations relatively underexplored with great detriment to those who are most vulnerable to experience such injustice. This paper aims to address this oversight and open up avenues for further research by exploring approaches to theorizing structural epistemic injustice in education and envisioning efficacious remedies. The author identifies three approaches: one that focuses on educational institutions, one that focuses on institutional processes that impact educational outcomes, and one that focuses on epistemological processes that are internal to education. While the approaches differ as to their explanatory power and ease of implementation, it is argued that all three demonstrate that epistemic injustice in education is often the result of structural factors which cannot be attributed to individual epistemic agents. The author concludes by suggesting that educational philosophers must examine each of these approaches in greater depth to make significant progress in disrupting the impact of epistemic injustice in education.

KEYWORDS: Epistemic Injustice, Structural Injustice, Educational Justice, Educational Policy, Educational Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Miranda Fricker's (2007) seminal book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, scholarship on epistemic injustice has extensively addressed the role of epistemic agents in the preservation of social injustice. From the undue deflation of marginalized speakers' credibility (Fricker 2007) to the unjust dismissal of the epistemic contributions of marginalized knowers (Mills 2007; Medina 2012; Pohlhaus 2012), philosophers have analyzed a

wide array of epistemic wrongs committed by culpable agents. Building on this scholarship, educational philosophers have addressed various 'culprit-based' manifestations of epistemic injustice (Kwong 2015) in education. Some of these include the unwillingness of teachers to accept knowledge provided by students due to identity prejudice against children (Murris 2013; Bartlett 2022), the exclusion of students from participation in educational conversations on equal terms (Hookway 2010; Haslanger 2014), the unreflective labeling of students by teachers (Frank 2022), and the tendency of privileged students to disregard the epistemic contributions of marginalized students (Whitt 2016; Applebaum 2020) or authors (Sayles-Hannon 2012).[1]

Beyond epistemically culpable agents, philosophers have addressed, albeit less extensively, structural manifestations of epistemic injustice. For instance, scholars have shown that epistemic injustice is, at least partly, attributable to structural forces and easier to remedy using structural solutions (Alcoff 2010; Langton 2010; Anderson 2012). Others have shown that social institutions can be epistemically vicious insofar as individuals that constitute them and structures that regulate them produce harmful effects (Fricker 2010, 2020) and can have epistemically corrupting effects on individuals that comprise them and/or are impacted by them (Kidd 2020, 2021). Still others have argued that structural accounts are better able to explain the presence of white ignorance in society (Martín 2021).

This research notwithstanding, the structural manifestations of epistemic injustice in education remain underexplored. This claim is not to suggest that no scholarship that probes into the structural manifestations of epistemic injustice exists in the field of philosophy of education. At least since the 1960s when sociologists of education began raising concerns about structural forms of epistemic injustice in schools (Young 1971), some philosophers of education

[1] For more examples of culprit-based manifestations of epistemic injustice in education see Kotzee (2017).

endeavored to address this problem—see, for example, Pring (1976) and Cooper (1980). More recently, philosophers of education have advanced structural accounts of epistemic wrongs in education like indoctrination (Taylor 2017, Martin 2023), white ignorance (Bain 2023; Nikolaidis 2023b), and epistemic corruption (Kidd 2019).

As encouraging as the existence of this scholarship is, it remains insufficient. First, the structural scope of epistemic injustice is much broader than the disproportionate focus on culprit-based accounts suggests. We have good reason to believe that epistemic injustice in education is largely the result of structural factors rather than culpable agents. For example, white ignorance can be attributed to residential segregation which is not the result of the individual choices of educators, parents, or residents (Rothstein 2017; Martín 2021; Nikolaidis 2023b). Furthermore, the structural landscape of epistemic injustice is more complex than individual structural accounts of epistemic injustice in education suggest. Structural factors abound and differ in kind, making it difficult to fit all of them under a single theoretical framework. Educational policies, institutional rules, cognitive processes, linguistic norms, and more, together constitute what is generally considered to be the structural landscape that circumscribes agency and produces unjust epistemic outcomes in education. The breadth and complexity of structural epistemic injustice warrants giving greater attention to structural factors to better understand what they involve, how they may differ depending on the theoretical framework one uses to analyze them, and what the best approaches to disrupt their impact may be.

To address these important considerations, this paper examines the ways in which education as a system enacts unjust epistemic structures and sustains structural epistemic injustice. In doing so, it departs from the domain of better researched culprit-based accounts and instead examines the relation of epistemic injustice to educational structures, the outcomes of

which cannot be attributed to individual agents. Specifically, the paper examines three approaches to theorizing structural epistemic injustice in education: the basic educational structure approach, the educational-structural processes approach, and the educational epistemological orientation approach. Based on these three approaches, the paper argues that, in their current form, educational structures produce epistemic injustice for which individual agents are not culpable. Moreover, each of these approaches is suggestive of different kinds of structural remedies to epistemic injustice. Finally, the paper shows that there is great nuance in these approaches, rendering the best approach to such analyses far from obvious. Accordingly, the aim of the paper is not to establish which approach is preferable but, more modestly, to draw attention to the multiple structural manifestations of epistemic injustice in education and to open up avenues for further research on (1) the ways in which educational structures produce and sustain epistemic injustice and on (2) appropriate measures for disrupting the impact of those structures.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before getting into the main part of the argument, two preliminary remarks are in order. First, to avoid inferences that the focus on structures lets culpable agents off the hook, I ought to clarify that the emphasis on structural epistemic injustice in education in no way decreases the significance of individual responsibility where this is warranted. Rather, it is intended to probe underexplored structural manifestations where individual action is constrained, such that it becomes difficult to draw a clear line between culpable conduct that is the result of individual agency and conduct undertaken because of external pressure (Young 2011; Haslanger 2015). In this sense, the structural account presented in this paper, and its implications for responsibility

for epistemic justice in education, is supplementary to well-theorized culprit-based accounts that identify culpable epistemic agents and the kinds of responsibility that these agents hold.

Second, before exploring structural approaches to epistemic injustice in education, I must clarify how I will consider the relation between epistemic injustice and education: namely, how epistemic injustice manifests in education and what kinds of wrongs properly fit in the space where epistemic injustice and educational injustice overlap. Clarifying this is important for two reasons. First, while there seems to be an obvious overlap between epistemic justice and educational justice (Kotzee 2013), one can, in theory, establish structural forms of educational injustice that are not at all epistemic. One, for instance, can foreground distributive justice considerations that center on the distribution of opportunities, resources, or capabilities. Second, one can identify forms of epistemic injustice that are not educational—at least not *prima facie*—such as the discriminatory cases identified by Fricker (2007) and others (e.g., Dotson 2012; Medina 2012; Pohlhaus 2012) that typically occur outside the context of formal educational institutions.

Here I embrace an expansive notion of epistemic injustice that incorporates its discriminatory (Fricker 2007; Dotson 2012), distributive (Coady 2010), and formative (Nikolaidis 2021a) dimensions. These entail a variety of epistemic wrongs with educational significance, including (1) the epistemic oppression of marginalized knowers who have an interest in contributing to the collective epistemic resources on which we rely to function as a society and which we impart to future generations, (2) the maldistribution of epistemic goods like education to which everyone has a right, and (3) the malformation of developing subjects whose development is compromised due to epistemic wrongs of the (1) and (2) variety. According to this expansive notion, the overlap between epistemic injustice and educational

injustice is substantial, if only partial. This is because, even when epistemic wrongs are not simultaneously educational wrongs, epistemic wrongs that harm people in their capacity as knowers often impede important formal, nonformal, and informal educational processes and, as a result, tend to have negative developmental consequences.

Epistemic injustice in education as I understand it is, therefore, not limited to standard varieties of epistemic injustice discussed in the literature (e.g., testimonial or hermeneutical injustice). Instead, it is expansive enough to include much of what typically falls under the purview of educational injustice, even though we may not consider it to be an epistemic injustice in the Frickerian sense. This expansiveness notwithstanding, the educational wrongs in question are only considered insofar as and because they harm people as knowers. In other words, while these educational wrongs may also be educational wrongs for non-epistemic reasons, it is their nature as distinctly epistemic wrongs that concerns me here.[2]

STRUCTURAL APPROACHES TO EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Depending on one's approach to theorizing educational structure, structural epistemic injustice in education carries distinctive implications for evaluating the nature and scope of the problem and for identifying potential solutions. Here, I will examine three approaches. The first approach theorizes educational structure as a collection of educationally relevant institutions, the second as a collection of material conditions and institutional processes that impact educational outcomes, and the third as a collection of epistemological processes that are internal to education and are,

[2] Some scholars have argued that educational justice should be understood as a form of epistemic justice because education is essentially an epistemic good (Kotzee 2013; Kotzee and Martin 2013). Similarly, elsewhere I have argued that epistemic injustice is one of two essential components of educational injustice (Nikolaidis 2021a, 2021b, 2023a). However, given the limited space that I have in this paper, I cannot sufficiently defend this view. For this reason, I will limit myself to considering the relationship between epistemic injustice and educational injustice as one of partial overlap. I consider this interpretation to be more widely accepted and less controversial than the more totalizing one that considers all educational injustice to be epistemic. However, the implications of the paper hold even when one considers the overlap between the two to be greater than implied here or even absolute.

for that reason, self-legitimizing. Each of these approaches, moreover, is suggestive of different structural remedies for disrupting structural epistemic injustice in education.

The Basic Educational Structure Approach

I begin my survey of structural accounts of epistemic injustice in education with an approach that draws on a Rawlsian analysis of social justice (Rawls 1971, 1977, 1993). According to this approach, the focus of epistemic injustice in education moves away from individual interactions between people within educational spaces and is placed on the basic educational structure. The basic educational structure would involve institutions, educational or otherwise, that impact the way that epistemic benefits and burdens or epistemic rights and duties are distributed to those who are part of the broader system of education. The concern of epistemic justice in this case is that institutions that are part of the basic educational structure distribute epistemic goods fairly. Call this *the basic educational structure approach* (henceforth BESA; see also Nikolaidis and Thompson 2021). Institutions that are part of the basic educational structure include, among others, the economy which requires that productive employees receive a relevant education, housing policies and markets that determine the opportunities to attend good schools, school funding policies, professional education of teachers and administrators, the public school system, the epistemic division of labor that determines who can teach what, and markets for educational products. Such institutions are educationally relevant because they delineate the scope of action of individual epistemic agents who aim to accomplish their epistemic ends through education.

However, because in pursuing their individual epistemic ends people may, on aggregate, undermine the educational opportunities of others (say by inadvertently hoarding educational resources), regulation is required to ensure that rules and incentives are such that the outcomes produced are fair for everyone. For instance, housing in the United States is highly segregated

along lines of race and class. Residential segregation, in combination with school funding policies that have historically relied on local property taxes to fund public schools, leads to unequally resourced schools that deny disadvantaged students good quality education. This is concerning because housing price differences prohibit disadvantaged families from moving to neighborhoods with good schools and compel them to stay in schools that are under-resourced and over-policed. As a result, disadvantaged students are more likely to become disengaged and drop out, or criminalized and pushed out, of school. These outcomes significantly minimize their chances for success in comparison to their advantaged peers, rendering the institutions implicated in their education epistemically unjust because they effectively deny disadvantaged students access to important epistemic goods and opportunities. The distribution of epistemic benefits and burdens by the basic educational structure is therefore unjust because it is unequal and fails to provide fair equality of epistemic opportunity to all members of society.

Of course, many more institutions that are part of the basic educational structure contribute to the unjust epistemic outcomes that the structure produces. Some of these are external to education, such as job markets which reward some knowers more than others and in doing so disincentivize the pursuit of certain valuable forms of knowledge, and some are internal, such as schools which often track students according to ability and in doing so tend to allocate epistemic resources disproportionately to students who are already epistemically advantaged. The point of these examples is not to be comprehensive but to demonstrate that the BESA focuses not on how individual interactions between students and teachers may lead to epistemic injustice in education, but on how educational institutions create circumstances that can produce epistemic injustice of the distributive kind (Coady 2010)—namely, denying students important epistemic goods and resources to which they have a right and that allow them to

advance their educational aims, understand their experiences better, and develop their epistemic agency.

This form of structural epistemic injustice is the result of institutional policies for which no individual is directly responsible, yet the aggregative decision-making of participants in the basic educational structure—e.g., parents who want to fulfill their obligation to give their children a quality education, teachers who want to improve their working conditions, company executives who yield to market forces, or politicians who want to avoid alienating their voters—may lead to unacceptable epistemic injustices for which no individual is directly responsible or blameworthy. Remedial action for such injustice then requires primarily institutional solutions.[3] Trying to transform participants in the structure into virtuous knowers cannot adequately address this problem as the institutional mechanisms that produce epistemic injustice are beyond individual agents' control and incentivize conduct that contributes to epistemic injustice in education. Such mechanisms influence, and even constrain, individual agents' behavior by shaping their educational aims or delineating the ways in which they can pursue those aims, often rendering it overly burdensome and even unreasonable to expect those agents to behave otherwise. The appropriate response, then, is to reorganize institutions in the basic educational structure, such that they are more likely to distribute epistemic goods fairly and produce epistemically just outcomes.

The Educational-Structural Processes Approach

The second approach I will examine draws on a Youngian analysis of structural injustice (Young 2006a, 2006b, 2011). This approach postulates that the basic educational structure is not limited to institutions that impact educational outcomes but also includes institutional processes that

[3] Depending on the injustice in question, nonetheless, individual solutions may also be warranted.

enable and constrain individual action because of how material conditions shape those processes. Call this *the educational-structural processes approach* (henceforth ESPA).

When we examine the basic educational structure with educational-structural processes in mind, we observe that the social and educational institutions that comprise the basic educational structure embody material conditions that are the result of history and relations of oppression and domination that have shaped the current state of society writ large. Such is the case, for instance, with the racially motivated housing policies discussed in the previous section, which concentrated wealth and resources into affluent majority white areas. Those policies shaped the educational landscape such that educational processes with epistemic significance, like the selection of higher education candidates or the conferral of valuable credentials to those who acquire requisite epistemic goods, continue to advantage those same populations. As a result, they continue to impact who has the ability to influence our collective epistemic resources. In other words, past decisions that have shaped the basic educational structure have left their trace by restricting the actions of some epistemic agents while facilitating those of others. Examining institutions and their distributive outcomes in isolation—as would the BESA—would likely leave relations of oppression and domination that produce unjust institutional outcomes in place, thereby rendering it difficult to create enduring change. Educational-structural processes that impact the state of epistemic justice in education, such as the development of epistemic standards or the division of epistemic labor, would inevitably continue to be characterized by unequal relations and therefore constrain those who are disadvantaged and enable those who are advantaged. This would render the reorganization of institutions within the basic educational structure a perpetual struggle to minimize the effects of oppression and domination that fails to address its root causes.

The ESPA is structural because the conduct of individuals within the basic educational structure is constrained and enabled by social and institutional rules and norms in ways that maintain the unjust basic educational structure. People who are subjected to structural processes are in an important sense compelled to make the decisions that they do. Depending on their social position, these decisions can be less or more advantageous for them. For instance, while wealthy white families might be able to move to poor neighborhoods and help with efforts to integrate schools, they are likely reluctant to do so because poor neighborhoods lack important resources, experience increased crime rates, and face negative environmental conditions such as air pollution. They are thus somewhat justified in their choice since the costs of the alternative might be too high.[4] At the same time, the legacy of redlining lowers property values in poor black neighborhoods and inflates property values of homes in white neighborhoods. This constrains black people's ability to reside in better neighborhoods as they are unable to accumulate wealth by gaining equity from their property. As a result of these historic inequalities and norms of reasonable behavior, relations of oppression and domination persist even as contemporary society is presumed to be egalitarian.

To understand how these processes come into play, one need only look at how the basic educational structure responds to distributive interventions. Where policies are introduced to remedy the differential provision of education by reorganizing the structure (as per the BESA), this may lead to problems that maintain the educational epistemic injustice in question—the unjust structure can perpetuate processes of domination and oppression that have historically characterized the educational system. For instance, a shortage of teachers that is the product of

[4] Consider Adam Swift's (2003) justice-motivated parents who would be willing to abolish private schools that undermine educational justice, yet, given current circumstances, be justified in sending their children to those same schools.

decades of disinvestment may, according to the distributive model of the BESA, render the provision of alternative certification options a reasonable solution. However, circumventing high-level professional education through alternative certification programs allows people to become teachers without sufficient pedagogical training. Teachers are also motivated to avoid costly graduate certification degree programs, as such options force them to accrue student debt and teachers are often paid little enough to make taking on debt financially imprudent. This outcome is a natural result of the exploitation that teachers experience as members of a feminized profession that is undervalued and underappreciated, but it also furthers the rationale for the exploitation of teachers who are viewed as being less than professionals. Alternative certification, moreover, allows under-resourced districts to populate their schools with under-prepared teachers with potentially detrimental impact for disadvantaged students who are most in need of good instruction. Again, from a distributive perspective this may be viewed as a legitimate solution to address the problem of teacher shortages for disadvantaged students, yet it perpetuates the historically ongoing process of educational disinvestment in disadvantaged communities whose needs are viewed as less important. Lack of quality instruction and poor educational outcomes have spurred and sustained efforts by education policymakers to overcome those deficits by imposing standards. These standards are not only difficult to meet because of the increased demands on teachers, but they are also often decided by people who espouse a dominant paradigm of education that may be ill-suited to address the educational needs of disadvantaged communities. The difficulty of meeting the standards, moreover, has led to an increasing reliance on the textbook industry for providing high-quality material to teachers. The textbook industry, in turn, is often beholden to market forces that give a portion of consumers disproportionate power over the content of textbooks (and other curricular materials), because of

their purchasing power and the industry's desire for uniformity that allows for-profit educational corporations to maximize their revenue, minimize their costs, and remain competitive. This, once again, enables the imposition of the hegemonic epistemic standards of those with greater power on those who are relatively powerless in shaping the epistemic standards that impact them.

As with the BESA, the ESPA underscores that individual actors are not necessarily blameworthy for the decisions that they make. Those decisions are often reasonable given the circumstances in which they are made and their alignment with what are generally considered to be acceptable norms and practices. The reasonableness of the decisions is further highlighted by the potential costs of making alternative, presumably justice-enhancing, decisions. For example, a white middle-class family moving to a poor black neighborhood to improve the school district through their resources and social capital might incur substantial costs (e.g., moving to an area with high environmental pollution) that no person should be expected to undertake. Importantly, such decisions might even backfire and increase epistemic injustice, instead of decreasing it, as marginalized students may be served worse in schools that begin to cater to the needs of a new influx of white middle-class students. For this reason, individual agents need not be culpable for their participation in these educational-structural processes that sustain epistemic injustice. After all, it is the cumulative effect of individual partially constrained actions that produces epistemic injustice and, thus, no individual or group of people can alone make significant change.

The Educational Epistemological Orientation Approach

The last approach to theorizing structural epistemic injustice in education that I examine draws on a Dotsonian analysis of epistemic oppression (Dotson 2012, 2014, 2018). In discussing what she calls 'a problem with epistemology,' Dotson (2018) shows that certain epistemological orientations accumulate epistemic power and marginalize epistemic considerations that, in order

to be revealed, require different epistemological orientations. By epistemological orientations, Dotson refers to modes of epistemic exchange whose variables delineate the scope of epistemic consideration and determine the epistemic status of claims. For instance, in the case of police shootings of unarmed black men, an epistemological orientation that is based on legal evidentiary variables is bound to offer justifications as to the 'reasonableness' of the shootings in light of legal protections provided to police officers for using lethal force when feeling threatened and the designation of victims as 'problematic' individuals who are often less than upstanding citizens. Such an orientation, nonetheless, may conflict with orientations that foreground moral variables and, in doing so, represent legal evidentiary considerations of the sort discussed above as wrongful beliefs that devalue black lives and legitimize abhorrent uses of state-sanctioned violence against marginalized communities.

The problem with epistemology, therefore, lies in the accumulation of epistemic power of epistemological orientations that justify wrongful and harmful practices of epistemic and non-epistemic import. Orientations with accumulated epistemic power become impossible to challenge through marginalized orientations, which are unable to gain uptake even as the epistemic considerations they raise are critically important. In the case of police shootings of unarmed black men, for instance, orientations with accumulated epistemic power prioritize legal standards and state-approved evidentiary norms that justify violent state practices and dissociate these practices from moral considerations that shed light on their moral indefensibleness. These orientations fail to challenge an unjust status quo that subjects people to oppression and, crucially, insulate themselves from critique on self-contained epistemic grounds. If a police officer was justified in killing a black suspect, then there is no question as to whether the act was morally permissible or not on grounds that this person was treated differently than a white person

would have been treated. This question, as it were, is beside the point and the public has no grounds to complain or protest the killing.

Importantly, this problem with epistemology is structural in nature in that what counts as relevant knowledge (according to an epistemological orientation) is conditioned by non-epistemic considerations of socioeconomic, political, and cultural relevance—the role of power and authority in the production of knowledge is relevant to the status of knowledge *qua* knowledge. In conditions of oppression, epistemological orientations with accumulated epistemic power are structurally unjust in that they are influenced by an unjust social structure that propagates epistemic injustice which contributes to and legitimizes oppression. To return to Dotson's example of police violence, in a society where white supremacy still has an ideological hold over social and political institutions it is easy to find evidence that aligns with the dominant epistemological orientation and legitimizes oppression. The victim broke a drug law which is objectively wrong, one might say, ignoring facts regarding the over-policing of black people who use drugs at equal rates as white people but are disproportionately surveilled because of their race. At the same time, the grievances of those who are victimized receive less uptake as their credibility comes into question and their epistemic contributions are rejected as being incongruent with the dominant epistemological orientation.

In transposing this problem with epistemology to an educational context, we find that the basic educational structure is epistemically unjust because it is guided by a wrongful and harmful epistemological orientation with accumulated epistemic power. Call this approach to analyzing structural epistemic injustice *the educational epistemological orientation approach* (henceforth EEOA). The epistemological orientation in question includes 'commonsense' assumptions regarding the aims of education, what counts as knowledge, and what schools are for. Moreover,

the orientation's accumulated epistemic power makes it difficult to refute—its implications are epistemic hegemony—and effectively excludes all other conflicting epistemological orientations, designating their implications to be educationally irrelevant or even harmful. For instance, morally relevant knowledge about the existence of injustice in society and the importance of values such as equality for people of all races and genders can be seen as being epistemically irrelevant from an educational perspective and, therefore, not belonging in schools.[5]

This becomes clear in the recent critical race theory controversy that has brought to the forefront discussions about the role of schools and content of curriculum. In a neoliberal and nationalistic educational paradigm that has reduced education to the development of human capital and the purpose of public education to that of developing a common national identity, there is no surprise that parents consider morally significant knowledge that is contested by some as unacceptably divisive and irrelevant to the aims of education. Education, it is thought, should stick to the basics, and moral education, social and emotional learning, and discussions on difficult topics such as race and gender ought to be left to the family. No student should be made to feel discomfort and all learning in schools should support socioeconomic ends.

Interestingly, the social-epistemic structures that influence these beliefs are distorted in that they assume a non-existent consensus about what counts as common education or uncontroversial content. In essence, whatever aligns with the dominant epistemological orientation can be deemed commonsensical or uncontroversial, while anything else can be contested and even deemed to be controversial irrespective of its epistemic validity. For instance, because of the exclusion of marginalized voices from history textbooks for decades and the dominant understanding of history as an objective discipline, any testimony or interpretation of

[5] On these points see also Táíwò (2017).

events that forces the public to confront previously concealed discomforting truths about the racialized nature of society is disqualified as being controversial or inaccurate—even as academic historians agree with much of what is contested. Similarly, STEM subjects are viewed as being objective, and interference with what is perceived as objective knowledge (say through the inclusion of scientists or mathematicians of colour at the expense of white scientists and mathematicians) is considered controversial as it excludes what our educational epistemological orientation casts as canonical and deserving of inclusion.

For the EEOA, it is inherent biases in our epistemic resources that distort epistemic processes as it is assumed that whatever aligns with the dominant epistemological orientation is correct. Moreover, inherent biases allow the epistemological orientation to insulate itself from critique leading to individuals talking past each other and being unable to understand one another. Here, again, while it is individuals who enact the unjust epistemic structures by assuming and reinforcing the accuracy and legitimacy of the dominant educational epistemological orientation, this orientation exceeds individuals' beliefs because it is ingrained within our very epistemic logic. In every waking moment, we are educated and socialized to draw certain inferences from the input we receive, and it is our being prompted to draw those inferences by the educational epistemological orientation we inhabit that renders this a structural problem that extends beyond the individual actions of epistemic agents (see Táíwò 2017; Fairbairn 2020).

The EEOA is more foundational than the other two approaches, as it demonstrates that education insulates the dominant epistemological orientation from critique and allows the unjust educational structure to operate unchallenged. It is not only the institutions that underlie education or the institutional processes that enact education that produce epistemic injustice, but

also, and more fundamentally, education *qua* education: the introduction of new humans into the epistemological orientation that informs our worldview and on which we rely to understand everything about reality, including the limitations of that very epistemological orientation.

STRUCTURAL REMEDIES FOR EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN EDUCATION

The three accounts discussed above diverge from one another and are somewhat incompatible. For instance, while the BESA views structures as rigid institutions that can be reorganized to predictably produce better epistemic outcomes, the ESPA views structures as dynamic and as being enacted and sustained by individuals who participate in structural processes. The EEOA homes in on epistemological processes that sustain epistemic injustice in and through education and demonstrates how these processes are influenced by extra-epistemic and extra-educational institutions. Differences notwithstanding, the three approaches raise a common concern: that epistemic injustice in education often arises from educational structures.

Recently, some scholars have challenged structural accounts of injustice, at least insofar as these pertain to whether individuals are blameworthy and can be held responsible for their contributions to injustice (e.g., Atenasio 2019; Matthew 2022). Such critiques can be extended to education as there, undoubtedly, are agents within the basic educational structure who wield inordinate power and are blameworthy for their contributions to the unjust structural outcomes. However, I wish to underscore that educational structures undeniably impact epistemic outcomes in ways not captured by discussions of individual responsibility—at least not when responsibility for epistemic injustice is conceptualized in terms of culpability (see Kwong 2015). While the three approaches reveal that individuals enact unjust structures and to that extent are collectively responsible for their continuing operation, these structures exceed individual actions. This renders their impact not easily attributable to individuals since individual agency is

circumscribed by institutional rules and norms, whether these institutions are directly educational (e.g., schools) or indirectly educational (e.g., political institutions that implement educational policy). Responsibility in such cases must take the form of accountability that does not seek to cast blame but to establish a forward-looking obligation to disrupt epistemic injustice in education on grounds that we collectively participate in the educational structure (Young 2011; Zheng 2019).

A focus on structures demonstrates that education as a system supports epistemic injustice. Disagreement may persist as to the appropriate scope of educational structure but, no matter its scope, the educational structure perpetuates epistemic injustice in ways that exceed individual culpability. This realization forces a reconsideration of the means within our disposal for disrupting epistemic injustice. Depending on what structural approach one subscribes to, the remedies that seem appropriate and our ability to implement them effectively may significantly vary. Some remedies, like policy reforms, may be easier to implement than others, like epistemological reorientation. Some may be more effective than others, depending on whether the diagnosis of structural problems they respond to better explains the state of reality. Either way, these are matters that require further theorizing by philosophers who do work on education policy. For now, I will limit myself to outlining three remedial approaches to disrupting structural epistemic injustice in education, each of which aligns with one of the three approaches to theorizing structural epistemic injustice in education.

Reorganizing the Basic Educational Structure through Redistributive Measures

To remedy the epistemic injustice that the basic educational structure produces by denying some students a good education and to create conditions of fair equality of epistemic opportunity in and through education, the U.S. federal government has often passed legislation that redistributes

resources to support the needs of disadvantaged students. For instance, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and reauthorizations thereof, authorized Title I funds for schools that serve poor students, which are intended to supplement state and local funding and provide additional resources to schools that serve disadvantaged students. Moreover, some states have moved away from local property tax-based funding formulas toward state-based funding formulas and combinations of the two.

However, since such approaches have not delivered the desired outcomes, other policies have been adopted. One involves increasing opportunities for school choice so that parents in poorly performing districts have the option to enroll their children in better performing schools. While this approach has also largely failed to yield its promised outcomes, one can imagine many more redistributive policies that could make a difference by correcting the way that the structure produces educational outcomes. Other policies could include a direct federal funding scheme for public schools that replaces the unequal local property tax funding scheme and reduces interstate funding disparities, the redistribution of teachers across districts to ensure that the least advantaged students are taught by equally skilled teachers as the most advantaged, and more. The point here is merely to show that, according to the BESA, changes ought to be made at the structural level and that trying to make change by inculcating epistemic virtue is inadequate.

Disrupting Unjust Educational-Structural Processes through Individual and Collective Action

For the ESPA, the above redistributive measures are bound to fail because they ignore the dynamic nature of the basic educational structure (Young 1990, 2006b, 2011). Instead, this approach would suggest that change cannot be accomplished unless individuals realize that they

experience structural constraints that compel them to enact the unjust basic educational structure when they pursue their own goals in, what they perceive to be, reasonable ways. To disrupt structural processes, then, those who enact them must change their conduct as much as reasonably possible and engage in collective action with others who, in virtue of their participation in structural processes, are also accountable for changing—though not necessarily culpable for—the unjust structure.

Changing one's individual behavior and participating in collective action will be easier for some than for others. Accordingly, one's responsibility for action is circumscribed by the costs incurred (Young 2011; Zheng 2018). For instance, the cost for a wealthy parent to send their child to a poor school district is much lower than the cost for a poor parent to work a second job so that they can afford a better education for their child. Similarly, the cost of protesting unjust policies that contribute to epistemic injustice in education, such as anti-CRT bills, is lower for wealthy parents who can afford to forego work than it is for poor parents who cannot afford to give up salaries for the purpose of engaging in political activism. Of course, more parameters have been presented by scholars of structural injustice that can be used to determine the scope of one's responsibility for structural epistemic justice in education, depending on one's social role and level of privilege (Young 2011; Zheng 2018).

Changing Epistemological Orientation through Epistemic Activism

Finally, the EEOA faces the difficulty that epistemic agents are unlikely to reorient themselves epistemologically because doing so contradicts the epistemological assumptions that they take for granted. To address this difficulty, epistemic processes that enact the epistemological orientation with accumulated epistemic power ought to be disrupted. This requires that marginalized epistemic agents and privileged allies engage in what José Medina calls epistemic

activism or ‘transgressive forms of epistemic interaction that call attention to, and potentially disrupt, contexts, intercontextual relations, and patterns of interaction that contribute to epistemic injustice’ (Medina and Whitt 2021: 309). Such interaction can occur in public spaces and disrupt business-as-usual conversations that are premised on and further legitimize the epistemic assumptions of wrongful and harmful epistemological orientations. Interrupting the enactment of these patterns of interaction and the epistemic logics that guide them allows epistemic agents to escape the grip of dominant epistemological orientations and disrupt the vicious circle of enacting self-justifying epistemically unjust orientations.

The work of the movement to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline is a case in point. At one level, the movement challenged epistemic injustice by successfully advocating against exclusionary policies that deny epistemic resources to disadvantaged students. At a more fundamental level, the movement challenged the epistemological orientation that justifies exclusionary punishment in schools: they reframed exclusionary punishment from a measure that maintains safety and supports learning to a manifestation of systemic racism and mass incarceration that denies opportunities to students of colour and students with disabilities. This epistemological reorientation was established through the introduction of concepts that accurately described the schooling experiences of disadvantaged students (e.g., school-to-prison pipeline) and the rejection of a de-agentified vision of schools as institutions from which students choose to ‘drop out’ for a vision of schools as institutions that actively ‘push out’ students and deny them educational opportunities (Warren 2022).

IMPLICATIONS OF EMBRACING A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Each of the approaches to theorizing structural epistemic injustice in education discussed above is based on different assumptions regarding the meaning of educational structure and is suggestive of different remedies. The BESA examines institutions that influence educational outcomes. The ESPA examines social and institutional processes, the meanings and norms that inform these processes, and the way in which these processes reify said meanings and norms as well as the institutions that embody them. Finally, the EEOA examines the dominant epistemic resources that we rely on and that shape the institutions that comprise the structure. It looks beyond institutions and institutional norms and processes, to epistemological systems that beget the meanings on which social and institutional processes rely and which legitimize the institutions themselves.

Each of the three approaches has its advantages and limitations based on the way it conceptualizes educational structure. The BESA's focus on institutions allows us to concentrate on the impact of institutional rules on the outcomes that the educational structure produces. It prompts us to think about the goals that people are likely to embrace based on the reward schemes and incentives that institutions produce, the ways in which epistemic agents can pursue their goals in a given institutional landscape, and the chances that epistemic agents have to accomplish their goals based on the procedural fairness of institutions. The advantage of this approach lies in its simplicity because it offers a detailed snapshot that reveals which institutions, and rules thereof, are responsible for producing injustices. Wherever rules and institutions are such that those who are advantaged are consistently more likely to accomplish their goals, they are deemed unjust and changes must be made to ensure that all have a reasonable chance to accomplish their goals. For instance, since exclusionary punishment consistently denies epistemically disadvantaged students access to epistemic resources, compounding their epistemic

disadvantage, it is epistemically unjust and must be removed from schools to equalize access to epistemic resources for all students. Because of its simplicity, moreover, the BESA is conducive to the development of easily implementable remedies. Direct causal links can be drawn between policies and outcomes, and policies that lead to unjust outcomes can be replaced with new ones. Should legislators and educational leaders garner the support of voters and political allies, structures are in place that allow new policies to be implemented quickly and effectively.

While the BESA elucidates which institutions and rules impede epistemic justice in education, it tends to ignore more complex diachronic processes that influence how institutions operate. This is, no doubt, a sacrifice that the BESA must make to identify clear causal links between institutions and outcomes. It is one thing to identify specific rules that contribute to unjust outcomes today and quite another to examine diachronic relations and power structures, determine their impact over time and how it manifests to this day, and identify interventions that mitigate the impact of both unjust rules and unequal relations. The latter approach not only renders it difficult to identify causal links between institutions and outcomes but also to enact policy that addresses the problem, as targeted policies are often unable to change trends that are the result of a confluence of forces that extend beyond institutions and impact the way in which institutions operate and implement even seemingly just policies. Yet to create enduring structural change, diachronic processes must be accounted for.

To address this limitation the ESPA shifts the discussion from institutions to processes. In doing so, the ESPA accounts for historical forces, agential dispositions, social norms, and cultural meanings that influence the way in which seemingly just policies are enacted and reproduce the epistemic status quo despite policymakers' reform efforts. For instance, in overcoming persistent epistemic disadvantages, where the BESA urges reform of content

standards, curricular tracking, and like policies, the ESPA also identifies underlying problems with who selects which policies are enacted, why some epistemic agents wield undue decision-making power over others, and what norms influence how policies are enacted and lead to failures in implementation. Similarly, where the BESA seeks to develop neutral school discipline policies that do not unduly burden students, the ESPA is also concerned with the underlying meanings on which street-level bureaucrats rely to make decisions when implementing discipline policy which leads to discriminatory treatment through biased implementation of *prima facie* neutral school discipline policy. The ESPA is therefore better equipped than the BESA to account for structural epistemic injustices because, even when policymaking is sound, such injustices often exceed the reach of policymakers' control.

In providing clarity on confluent and diachronic structural forces, nonetheless, the ESPA loses much of the specificity and applicability that the BESA offers. Specific policy targets become less useful tools for change as the focus is placed on how policies interact with institutional rules and social norms to produce an overarching structure that cannot be improved or disrupted through piecemeal change at the institutional level. Policy reform without change in individual conduct is bound to fail. Radical change is required that exceeds the scope of institutions, which is why the ESPA requires collective action that pressures multiple agents with various levels of power and privilege to disrupt structural processes that sustain injustice. This approach is more complicated given the large-scale coordination it requires and more elusive as it becomes impossible to assess the impact of individual policies and reforms in isolation. Progress is evaluated as changes are made at multiple levels and points of interaction, disrupting the stability of the structure and reshaping norms and dispositions that preserve the status quo.

In considering the ESPA's focus on social and institutional processes and the meanings that inform them, one is prompted to further question the epistemological apparatus on which we rely when making meaning of situations. Importantly, this apparatus is also biased and tends to privilege certain epistemological standards that are antecedent to the meanings that inform conduct. This is the problem that the EEOA seeks to address. By moving away from institutions and institutional processes to meanings, the EEOA challenges the epistemological systems that give birth to those meanings. Here the problem considered is not particular policy schemes (à la BESA) nor processes that tend to produce unjust outcomes despite how seemingly just the policies implemented are (à la ESPA), but rather the way we conceptualize policy to begin with—our methods of formulation, implementation, and evaluation which determine what policy options are legitimate and who has the expertise to make credible policy decisions and jurisdiction to implement the policies enacted. The EEOA thus goes beyond institutional structures and processes to interrogate our epistemological tools for understanding what those structures and processes involve. To return to the example of discipline, the EEOA is not so much concerned that discipline policies inflict added burdens on students of colour or that discriminatory implementation is considered acceptable by a majority of school officials, but, more fundamentally, that the epistemological orientation which underpins discipline policy enables the justification of such outcomes in ways that make them seem reasonable. In a system where rule violations are conceptualized as a threat to safety, appropriate responses to violations are considered to be punitive, and the standard for evaluating whether a violation occurred is the perceived existence of evidence by biased school officials, the outcome is inevitably self-justifying by the epistemological orientation on which these premises are grounded.

While the EEOA sheds further light on the ideational aspects of unjust structural processes, it renders appropriate responses to structural injustice even more elusive than the ESPA. Reforming institutions, and rules thereof, in isolation or even in combination with behavioral changes is insufficient. What is needed is to rebuild the educational structure from the ground up to escape epistemological presuppositions that legitimize unjust institutions and structural processes. However, such a remedy completely dissociates efforts to accomplish epistemic justice from current institutions, policies, processes, and moral standards. This dissociation might, at least in the short term, diminish our collective efficacy in accomplishing epistemic justice aims as many of the levers on which we rely are rendered suspicious. Even the gains of the movement to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline can be challenged for relying on quantitative research to demonstrate disciplinary disparities, and in doing so reifying epistemological methods that have been, and continue to be, used to justify the subjugation and epistemic oppression of marginalized groups (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008). For this reason, the EEOA sets an overwhelmingly demanding standard for disrupting structural epistemic injustice in education. This is not to suggest that a high standard is not warranted but rather to highlight barriers to implementation.

CONCLUSION

The above survey of structural approaches to, remedies for, and implications of epistemic injustice in education is not intended to suggest that all three approaches are equally (un)satisfactory. Certainly, some—like the ESPA and the EEOA—have greater explanatory power and are better able to account for the persistence of epistemic injustice, despite efforts to disrupt it through policy reform. However, while I am more sympathetic to latter two approaches than I am to the former, my aim here is not to advocate for one approach over another. As I hope

to have shown there is nuance in each of these approaches that affords them their different strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, it is likely that given the severity of structural epistemic injustice in education, we must rely, at least for now, on all three to start moving the needle toward justice by working within a system and employing epistemological resources that we are simultaneously trying to undermine.

Given the obvious philosophical problems and paradoxes that such a combination of approaches creates, I hope that this analysis instigates a conversation in the realm of epistemic injustice in education that focuses on the structural forces that sustain it rather than on the individual deficiencies of epistemic agents who are culpable for committing epistemic injustices. Regardless of which of the three approaches one finds most compelling and whether one favors ease of implementation or explanatory power, scholars of epistemic injustice in education must examine in greater depth how educational structures contribute to epistemic injustice. This is an important starting point that would allow us more efficaciously to remedy the epistemic wrongs of educational structures on marginalized epistemic agents.

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