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Teaching as Epistemic Mistrust

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Abstract

Long portrayed as a virtuous profession, teaching has always been embedded in notions of trust and trustworthiness. Alongside expectations of epistemic cultivation and development, is an implicit handing over of discretionary powers to 'the trusted teacher'. At the height of #blacklivesmatter protests in 2020, however, high school learners all over South Africa took to social media—@yousilenceweamplify—to express their hurt and anger at their dehumanising experiences at some of the country's leading schools. Their accounts not only exposed some schools as intense sites of racial, religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic tension and conflict, but shattered presumptions about 'the trusted teacher'. Following a consideration of what trust infers, and the potential harms that arise from epistemic mistrust, the paper considers what might be gained from philosophical engagements in the espousal of teaching as a relationship of epistemic trust, and which ensures the flourishing of both learner and teacher? How might philosophy of education assist teacher education programmes in attuning students to an understanding that being trustworthy as teachers resides in self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the differences of, and among others?

Keywords Epistemic trust · Trustworthy · Teachers · @yousilenceweamplify · South Africa

Introduction

The flurry of educational reform which ushered in South Africa's transition to a democracy in 1994, reverberated profoundly in a curriculum overhaul, replacing Christian National Education with Outcomes-Based Education. Reform measures also included the much-anticipated desegregation of schools, which would (theoretically, at least) see the doors of learning open to all equally (Davids 2022). Together, these major changes were meant to provide the necessary educational setting for accommodating a diverse learner demography. Schools and education would no longer operate along race-based ideologies and inequalities. Instead, schools would become prime sites of preparing citizens, who are capacitated and prepared to actively participate in a democratic society. Underscoring these

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expectations are particular ideals associated with teachers and schools, as having both the capacity and willingness to foster democratic values.

Despite immense policy reform, the historical privileging of ‘white’ schools continues to juxtapose with under-resourced and overcrowded ‘black’ schools’, three decades into the country’s democracy. Apartheid legislation had laid solid foundations in historically advantaged (‘white’) schools. Funding allocations to schools were based on the taxes paid by the communities which they served. This meant that ‘black’ schools received only a fraction of the amount made available to ‘white’ schools. It also meant an unequal provision of school buildings, educational resources, such as science laboratories, libraries, sporting facilities, toilets, and inadequate provision of teachers, both in terms of numbers and quality (Spaull 2013). Hence, the predictable migration patterns of ‘black’ learners seeking enrolment at historically ‘white’ schools. This has led to discernible shifts in learner demographics at former ‘white’, ‘Indian’ and ‘coloured’ schools, which, in some instances have resulted in a complete racial shift at some schools. However, because of the introduction of exorbitant school fees at most historically ‘white’ schools, ‘black’ schools continue to be attended exclusively by ‘black’ learners. In turn, ‘white’ learners almost exclusively attend historically ‘white’ schools, effectively contradicting narratives of integration and deracialisation in schools in South Africa (Gruijters et al 2022).

There are several reasons (including policies) for the re-perpetuation of schools along racial lines, despite desegregation. On the one hand, according to Jansen and Kriger (2020), the continuation of ‘white’ dominated schools in post-apartheid South Africa is not an accident of history, but a consequence of apartheid policies systematically designed to advance ‘white’ citizens at the expense of ‘black’ South Africans. On the other hand, the legacy of segregated and unequal education is a consequence of post-apartheid government policies that sustain two parallel school systems with the pattern of bimodal performance in academic outcomes (Spaull and Jansen 2019). Jansen and Kriger (2020) highlight conscious policy actions taken by predominantly ‘white’ School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to retain historical racial identities and privilege. The South African Schools Act (DoE 1996) allows SGBs to design its own admission policies, which include determining school fees, and selecting the language(s) of teaching and learning. There is no statutory cap on the school fees, which means that a SGB can set the fees at any level without limits imposed by either the national or provincial departments of education (Jansen and Kriger 2020). While apartheid propagated explicit racial discrimination and exclusion, democratic South Africa has seen the emergence of new race-class configurations of exclusion. As a result, argues Gruijters et al (2022), regardless of how we measure it, school segregation in post-apartheid South Africa remains very high along racial, as well as socioeconomic lines.

These overt exclusionary measures notwithstanding, even where schools have diversified in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, and language, most schools have not succeeded in creating and cultivating integrated learning and social spaces (Naidoo et al. 2018; Soudien and McKinney 2016). The interest of this paper, however, is not the structural wrongs of historical segregation but, rather, their epistemic effects and arising injustices. Desegregation is largely measured in terms of the representation of learner diversity. Uninformed presumptions have been made about the preparedness and willingness of teachers to teach and engage with diverse learner communities. The thinking in South Africa continues to be that because schools are desegregated, integration and inclusion of diversity will follow. As a result, very little is known about the lived experiences of learners, who, because of their minority group status, are rendered as out of place in especially historically ‘white’ schools. Scant attention is given to what happens to learners, who are prejudged as inadequate, unintelligent, and incapable of owning knowledge, because of who they are.

More specifically, blackness is used as a marker for discrimination, othering and exclusion, thereby leading to experiences of epistemic harm. This harm, as Burlando-Salazar (2023) explains is distinct from a more general credibility harm. Epistemic harm refers 'to harm that damages an individual's perception of their own knowledge and experiences, and whether they feel as if they have the epistemic and communicative tools to convey that information' (Burlando-Salazar 2023, p. 1245). Typically, these harms might arise among and from learners, which, depending on their gravity might lead to interventions from teachers, thereby providing some measure of recourse for learners, who suffer these harms. But when teachers inflict epistemic harm, it is especially damaging, not only because of the power imbalance between teachers and learners, but also because teachers occupy positions of trust. Hence, when teachers act unethically by inflicting epistemic harm onto some learners, they risk losing the trust of learners, as well their positions of trust.

Questions then follow as to the preparedness of teachers to teach diverse groups of learners in this ethically complex context, including their capacity to address the epistemic harms that arise (Orchard and Davids 2019). Of course, as Di Muzio et al. remind us in this special issue, 'there are a huge number of thoughtful educators who see their work as facilitating the growth and flourishing of their students, who are dogged in their inquiry about how education can better serve their students'. But, at the same time, notions and characterisations of teachers as unethical and downright harmful are not new. And once learners suspect that their teachers do not align with their expectations of good and ethical behaviour, trust becomes fragile, and the relationship becomes vulnerable. This is because trust, explains Chew (2023), is interpersonal and involves a subjective judgment about the motives of others that may or may not be accurate. The teaching–learning relationship demands trust: learners need to trust that their teachers are qualified and equipped to them; they also need to trust in their teachers' unbiased judgement and assessment of their work and potential. Learners are astute enough to make certain judgements about their teachers' knowledge. They are also attuned enough to know when teachers treat them unfairly, differently, or harmfully. The issue of trust, therefore, is centrally located in how learners encounter their teachers and how they engage in their own learning.

The paper commences by attending to conceptions of trust and trustworthiness, and the presumption of these virtues within teaching and teachers. This is followed by a specific focus on the series of social media accounts, under the hashtag @yousilenceweamplify. These are learners' narratives, which exposed experiences of racial, religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic tensions at some schools, ultimately bringing presumptions about 'the trusted teacher' into disrepute. The paper concludes by considering what might be gained from philosophical engagements in the espousal of teaching as a relationship of epistemic trust, which ensures the flourishing of both learner and teacher. And specifically, how philosophy of education might assist teacher education programmes in attuning students to an understanding that being trustworthy as teachers resides in self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the differences of, and among others. If we accept that one of the purposes of education is to produce a particular kind of human being, who is able to actively participate and contribute to their society, then it follows to wonder not only about the content, but also about the nature of education. In this regard, philosophy underpins every aspect of the unfolding of education – from the conception of a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, to how the educative encounter is moulded, and hence, the relationships between teachers and learners.. Philosophy of education is as concerned with theory as it is with practice; it is as interested in the classroom as it is in the world outside; it is also as attentive to what is worthwhile knowledge as it is to notions of equality, fairness, care, compassion, justice and trust. It matters, therefore, how teachers invite learners into their own learning, and how

they experience the teaching–learning encounter. Here the concern is not only about pedagogical methods or initiatives, but also about the responsiveness of teachers, and indeed, whether the latter is unhampered by biases. As such, philosophy of education is deeply cognisant of the role and power of teachers to either facilitate and open learning or to hinder and misguide it. Philosophy of education, as Dunne points out in this SI has everything to do with classroom practice; it provides and confirms 'the merits of transdisciplinary, hybridised, zetetic practices that can generate novel insights from the cross-fertilisation of ideas and concepts…' And although the inclusion of philosophy of education does not sufficiently guarantee the result that every pre-service teacher attains the perfect ability to philosophise education, says Hung (in this SI) at least it channels the pre-service teacher in this direction in a more likely way.

Trust and Trustworthiness

Trust, explain Levi and Stoker (2000, p. 476), is relational; 'it involves an individual making herself vulnerable to another individual, group, or institution that has the capacity to do her harm or to betray her'. Trust is seldom unconditional and is given to specific individuals or institutions over specific domains (Levi and Stoker 2000). To be considered trustworthy, states D'Olimpio (2001, p. 193), 'one must do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons, and the action should have its intended effect'. To be trustworthy means that one can be counted or relied upon. When teachers, for example, are seen or experienced as treating all learners equally and fairly whether in daily encounters or when allowing learners' extensions on assignment submission dates, their learners will conclude that they can be trusted. Yet, even when there is no call or reason for trust, continue Levi and Stoker (2000), a person or institution can possess the attributes of trustworthiness, which assure potential trusters that the trusted party will not betray a trust. Of course, depending on the disparate and at times, dysfunctional contexts of South African schools, gaining and sustaining this trust can be complex. This complexity is exacerbated by a history of segregated schooling, which not only entrenched racial divisions, but also succeeded in propagating 'white' supremacy at the expense of devaluing 'black' lives. 'Black' learners, therefore, do not simply enter historically 'white' schools in a new democratic society. Instead, at times, they come into this space within a context of historical non-belonging and mistrust.

The attributes of trustworthiness fall along two dimensions. The first, according to Levi and Stoker (2000, p. 476), 'involves a commitment to act in the interests of the truster because of moral values that emphasize promise keeping, caring about the truster, incentive compatibility, or some combination of all three'. They maintain that when we call someone trustworthy, 'we often mean only this commitment, but there is in fact a second dimension, namely competence in the domain over which trust is being given. The trustworthy will not betray the trust as a consequence of either bad faith or ineptitude (Levi and Stoker 2000, p. 476). This is an understanding commonly assumed by parents, even when they might not be aware that they are making these assumptions. With some exceptions, schools are chosen by parents by *what* they can produce in terms of academic achievement, and not *who* their teachers are. Often, it is enough assurance for parents to know that their children are being taught by 'good' teachers, as defined by their content knowledge or pedagogical skills, not who they are as people. Jansen and Kriger (2020, for example, highlight that school choice in South Africa is driven by perceptions of 'quality' education, typically associated with the National Senior Certificate (grade 12) results. Parents are seemingly

only interested in the educational outcome of a good final year result, which opens a pathway for university acceptance.

These kinds of interpretations and understandings which inform the decision-making of parents, are reflective not only of the kind of performative discourse which determines and dominates the functioning of schools but also provides commentary on the silence which pervades considerations of what happens at schools, or what kinds of teachers are employed. Unless parents have inside knowledge, or have historical experiences with a school, it is unlikely they or their children, would doubt or question whether the trust they have in teachers is warranted, or whether it could lead to harmful consequences. For most parents, the designation of 'the teacher' is sufficient reason and assurance for trust.

Trust, however, is a fragile emotion or attitude and is clearly not without vulnerability. When learners feel or believe that they can trust their teachers, it is because they have been led to believe that it is safe for them to do so. Baier (1991, p. 112) points out that trust consists of an implicit belief component, 'belief in the trusted ones' [teachers] goodwill and competence, which then grounds the willingness to be or remain within their power in a way the mistrustful are not, and to give them discretionary powers in matters of concern to us'. For some learners, the ability to trust might have been hampered by experiences in their homes, they might have been reared in an environment of disappointment, dishonesty, or disloyalty, leaving them with a weakened sense of security in others. Hence, while some learners might readily accept the implicit trust typically associated with teachers, others might be reluctant to do so, and mistrust teachers as authority figures.

Levi and Stoker (2000) assert that while trusting someone emanates from a sense of safety and connection, 'mistrust' sits at the opposite end of the continuum and can be accompanied by vigilance, or in more extreme cases, a complete severing of the relationship. To this end, some learners might come into the teacher-learner relationship with mistrust, based on past experiences or socialisations into relationships. Others, however, might learn to mistrust, based on the teachers' actions, or more problematically, based on who they are. To trust someone, states Hawley (2012), is to rely upon that person to fulfil a commitment. Mistrust is not the mere absence of trust; mistrust involves an expectation of unfulfilled commitment (Hawley 2012).

Following Hawley (2012), Faulkner (2015, p. 425–426) holds that 'the mere absence of trust might report nothing about one's attitudes but rather stem from the fact that there is no cause for reliance'. It is not uncommon for individuals to express mistrust in someone without any justification, other than a 'gut feeling'. Other times, trust is irrelevant, because the relationship is considered as insignificant. Importantly, however, when mistrust arises, it is an attitude in its own right, and, says Faulkner (2015), one might expect, there to be analytic connections between the attitudes of trust and mistrust – that is, if mistrust is an appropriate attitude to take, then trust is not. Moreover, trust and mistrust are not contradictories, but contraries (Faulkner 2015). A lack of trust, explains Faulkner 'need not imply mistrust because there might be a lack of trust because there is a lack of reliance; there is no contract, as it were…' Importantly, therefore:

> [B]eing trusted is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the possibility of such betrayal. Trust is not necessary, because we can be betrayed by those we mistrust, and indeed mistrust can include expectation of betrayal. You can know that you will be betrayed: Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. Yet trust is impossible in such a situation, so betrayal does not require trust (Hawley 2012, p. 13)

In the challenging circumstances experienced in South African schools, learners (as well as teachers and parents) are likely to doubt the knowledge or capability of teachers, based

on their race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, or even accent (Davids 2019). Mistrust is widespread because of pre-existing stereotypes or prejudices about certain identity markers, regardless of the competencies of the teacher. Here, we are reminded of Fricker's (2007: 1) account of epistemic injustice in which someone is wronged 'in their capacity as a knower'. In the specific example provided here, 'black' teachers are subjected to what Fricker (2007, p. 1) refers to as testimonial injustice, which occurs 'when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word'. In turn, hermeneutical injustice, according to Fricker (2007, p. 1) 'occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences'. For example, in a state-based online survey of LGBTIQA+ teachers in New South Wales, Ullman (2018) found that some participants had not disclosed their gender/sexuality diversity to learners, parents, or colleagues, because they feared their credibility would be challenged. Of participants who experienced LGBTIQA+ bias-based discrimination, verbal homo/transphobic harassment was most commonly perpetrated by learners (Ullman 2018). In this regard, the identities of teachers are used in support of undermining, discriminating, and mistrusting the credibility and competency of teachers. In sum, the knowledge brought or offered by certain teachers is mistrusted because of who they are.

The same attitude and treatment can be demonstrated by teachers towards learners. This, despite perceptions of teaching as a virtuous profession, even calling, and hence unstated expectations of teachers as trustworthy and acting in a position of trust. Post-apartheid educational reform ushered in reconceived notions of professional teacher identities. Central to this reform is a policy propagation of 'the teacher', who is not only presumed as qualified and competent, but also as wholly committed to fulfilling the seven roles stipulated by policy makers (DoE 2000). These are: Learning Mediator; Interpreter and Designer Of Learning Programmes and Materials; Leader, Administrator and Manager; Scholar, Researcher and Lifelong Learner; Assessor; Learning Area, Subject, Discipline and Phase Specialist. An additional Community, Citizenship and Pastoral Role involves practising and promoting 'a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others' (DoE 2000, p. 14).

In efforts to ensure the professionalisation of teaching, and hence good and trustworthy conduct, the South African Council for Educators (SACE) advocates a 'Code of Professional Ethics' (SACE 2002):

- Respecting the dignity, beliefs and constitutional rights of learners and in particular children,
- which includes the right to privacy and confidentiality
- Exercising authority with compassion
- Avoiding any form of humiliation or abuse (physical or psychological) of learners
- Not being negligent in the performance of his or her professional duties (SACE, 2002, p. 6).

The Code Professional Ethics (SACE 2002) carries specific ideas of who teachers are and how they should conduct themselves. Implicit in these ideas – some might say ideals – are expectations of teachers to honour their position of trust by acting in trustworthy ways. By stipulating a particular code of conduct, teachers are being asked to recognise the ethics associated with teaching, and hence, how they enact a professional teacher identity. The Code serves as a reminder that teachers are expected to adopt full ethical subjectivity that holds them responsible for their actions. Implicit in the directives of the Code is an

awareness of the inherent complexities in schools and teaching. Teachers are being asked not only to respond to these complexities, but to do so ethically. Attending or adhering to the Code of Professional Ethics, therefore, requires reflecting on who teachers are, what their values are, how they plan to enact their identity, what it means to act ethically, as well as the accountability which necessarily accompanies the role of being a teacher.

The importance of the Code of Professional Ethics (SACE 2002) notwithstanding, it also suggests that that it is indeed possible to regulate teachers' conduct. Missing from any post-apartheid policy is a recognition of teachers' emotional and political identities (Jansen 2001). It is problematic, contends Britzman (1992), when a teacher's identity is taken for granted, when it is approached in some a priori way, embedded in the normative discourse of teacher education, and unquestioningly assumes that teachers' identities are is synonymous with their role and function. This concern notwithstanding, there is a notable difference between learners mistrusting teachers, and teachers acting in untrustworthy ways, or revealing themselves as trustworthy, and possibly causing epistemic harm.

To trust someone epistemically, or to place epistemic trust in someone, clarifies McCraw (2015, p. 419), 'there is some resulting epistemic or cognitive state in the one who does the trusting. This means that we should have a belief component to ETs.' Hence, while trust in general relies on the fulfilment of a commitment (Hawley 2012), epistemic trust 'necessarily requires a doxastic or belief component whereas trust in general need not (though it may); it 'does not occur without some kind of ground or cause that brings about the belief in question with the content that it has' (McCraw 2015, p. 419). In the classroom, the teacher has to understand what trust means both to the learners and to her teaching. Epistemic trust relies on recognising the inter-connectedness of actions within the inter-relationality of teaching and learning. Epistemic trust is influenced by what is already known and experienced. Hence, if a teacher is viewed as dishonest or favours certain learners, while barely recognising others, the epistemic trust needed for learners to willingly learn or take advice from this teacher is placed under strain. This is because epistemic trust also relies on learners being seen as they are, so that the teacher accepts them in whatever differences. Hence, Dunne's (in this SI) description of epistemic co-dependence, in which teaching can act as a catalyst for deepened cognition and understandings not only about pieces of information, but the connections between those pieces.

Epistemic mistrust is characterised by inflexible thinking patterns and closedness to learning from others and the social environment. According to Pierre (2020, p. 620), 'epistemic mistrust refers to mistrust of knowledge or, framed within its proper socio-cultural context, mistrust of authoritative informational accounts'. He continues that epistemic mistrust is often rooted in interpersonal mistrust and can vary on a continuum from generic skepticism or epistemic vigilance on one end, to a middle-ground of suspiciousness.

Trusting, mistrusting, being trusted, and being mistrusted, explains Hawley (2017), can all flow from the exercise of social power, and all can have consequences for social power. She argues that you may deny other people important opportunities when you fail to trust them, both through the practical consequences of your mistrust and through its symbolic power. To Hawley (2017), these exercises of social power stand in complicated relationships to privilege and security—those with few resources may be forced to trust others, such as minority group learners in schools. And where there is social power, as held by teachers, there is the potential for injustice (Hawley 2017), which takes us to '@ yousilenceweamplify'.

Issues of mistrust and violations of mistrust are not uncommon in schools. Learners might learn to mistrust their teacher when it becomes evident that she has broken their confidence, or assesses learners unfairly. In more complex cases, learners might mistrust

teachers based on their identities and associated prejudices. At one primary school, a grade five learner asked: "Are black teachers real teachers?' (Pather 2018). Many similar cases have been reported in South African schools where learners and parents alike question the competency of 'black' teachers, going as far as asking for proof of qualifications (Davids 2023). These are reprehensible acts, but there is adequate scope for redress with learners. With teachers, this is less the case. When teachers treat learners differently and discriminatingly because of who they are, it brings into disrepute not only the teacher-learner relationship as well as the teaching–learning relation, but also the teaching profession. This is because accompanying expectations of epistemic cultivation and development, is an implicit handing over of discretionary powers to the trusted (the teacher) (Baier 1991). Unlike cases which involve learners and parents, cases in which teachers are the perpetrators of epistemic harm, present a more complex dilemma.

Learners, who are subjected to racism or other forms of discrimination – as will be shown in in the next section – are placed in onerous positions. On the one hand, they might hesitate to report the matter for fear of reprisal from the teacher; they might be concerned about not being believed; they might also be too ashamed or afraid to inform their parents. On the other hand, when the learners remain silent and do not react, the teacher might interpret their silence as submission, allowing her not only to get away with her actions, but also to persist. Additionally, even if learners speak out and report the teacher, they might still have to remain in her class. Notably, the epistemic harm, is not momentary or limited to the actual racist encounter. The epistemic harm extends into the duration of the learners' time with the teacher, because they have been made aware of how she perceives them. Every engagement which follows thereafter, whether inside or outside the classroom, is affected by the learners' loss of trust in the teacher. Of greater concern, is the lasting effects of the epistemic harm on the self-perceptions and self-esteems of learners – as laid bare in the accounts below..

@yousilenceweamplify

The series of Instagram accounts, which trended under the hashtag, '@yousilenceweamplify', was certainly not the first time that incidents of racism, discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion had been called out at specifically former 'white' schools. It is hard to ascertain a clear sense of the full extent of the frequency or intensity of discriminatory practices meted out against minority group learners at predominantly 'white' schools. On the one hand, incidents which are reported in the media are typically only the tip of the iceberg. While learners might fear further victimisation or isolation, parents might feel not feel capacitated or supported enough to confront the school (Davids 2022). On the other hand, social media cannot always be counted on as a trustworthy source. Schools can be placed in precarious situations in trying to maintain the professional treatment of staff members against accusations on social media, which are often anonymous. This concern notwithstanding, it is reasonable to expect schools to be safe and free of all kinds of harm. Following the social media disclosures on @yousilenceweamplify', a few schools embarked on a series of interventions, such as 'dialogues on race', workshops with teachers, parents and learners. One school instituted three investigations into racism, and subsequently, two teachers were disciplined and 'exited' following charges of racism (Bhengu 2021). Considering these responses, as well the acknowledgement by a few schools that they could have done better in ensuring the inclusion and fair treatment of all their learners (Tembo 2020), it is possible to conclude that at least some of the learners' disclosures on

'@yousilenceweamplify' are true. Importantly, he acknowledgement by some schools confirms the criticality of ethics in teaching, and hence, the urgency of prioritising it in teacher education programmes.

Segregation, as Thurman (1966) reminds us, does not only signal a regulation of access and participation; segregation is 'the exercise of raw power by one group of people over the lives of another group of people', ingrained and guaranteed by economic, political, social and religious sanctions. Desegregation, therefore, is not only a matter of allowing diverse groups of children to learn together. Desegregation sets into motion of new kind of society, in which the privileging of one group can no longer rely on the exclusion and oppression of another.

At the height of the '#BlackLivesMatter' protests, following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis in 2020, learners across South Africa took to social media, under the banner '@yousilenceweamplify' to expose their own experiences at historically 'white' schools. While reduced to a series of Instagram postings, the accounts capture entire schooling careers characterised by subjections to racism, ridicule, exclusion, and humiliation by a few teachers. Underscoring narratives of painful encounters and exchanges are profound learner experiences of disappointment and mistrust not only in teachers, but in their own capacities to be who they are, and to pursue what they desire to become. Below are just a few of these accounts (https://www.instagram.com/yousilenceweamplify/):

> I attended this school and witnessed a number of racist incidents on more than a few occasions. Coloured kids were asked to enunciate their words properly during presentations, Indian kids were not allowed to take their religious holidays. Muslim kids were shunned from wearing hijab, black students were encouraged to wear their hair in a 'neat' style while white girls walked around with their hair loose … When I wanted to wear a traditional identifier of my culture and religion, I was told to take it off as it did not represent the school and its code of conduct, it was ripped from my neck by one of the teachers and confiscated. It was a religious symbol. I called my parents to complain, and they were told 'you know what school you sent your daughter to, she must abide by our rules'.
>
> I can't stop thinking about the fact that an openly racist teacher called me a "k…." in class and is still allowed to teach/work in a boarding house.
>
> I have always been really insecure about my hair for the longest time. But on my last year of school, I really enjoyed having my afro out. One day I was walking to my desk and he (the teacher) turned around and gasped and said 'Are you scared?' He later explained that I look like a cat that got scared. At other times he would say that I only combed my hair like that so that it would look bigger than it is.
>
> During the month of Ramadaan, a teacher asked me 'why my religion tortured me into fasting while writing exams'.
>
> I've become one of 3 people simply because we're all of the same colour and our names begin with K. On numerous occasions I've been shouted at for things I have not done because she has mistaken me for one of two other girls.
>
> Staff were instructed in a staff meeting that black learners should be reprimanded when speaking their home language as it was considered to be rude.
>
> When I was in matric, a white history teacher told gr9's that apartheid is just a conspiracy and that it never happened. Teachers would constantly say that BEE was a scam and that it was unfair for POCs to get a benefit over 'hardworking white people'.

> My experiences of racism was from the moment I attended that school in grade 3. My grade 3 teacher made my school journey tremendously difficult. I was the only black student in her class … There was a day when I had forgotten my school hat at home. You needed a hat to play on the school field during lunch break. She who was also the lost and found teacher, dug into the lost and found box and threw a hat at me from across the room, she then marched over to me twisted my ear while lifting me off the ground. I still remember the pain of that event. I didn't tell my parents because I had already felt guilty with having them let down, with being called in by [the teacher] every week, telling my parents that I am the slowest learner, how I don't belong at this school…
>
> This school broke my spirit, I went in confident, happy and optimistic. I left feeling broken, beaten, unworthy, hating the world, lost, hopeless and angry. This school made me hate being a POC.

Initial responses by principals and school governing bodies reveal at least two matters of concern: an incapacity to acknowledge, in the first instance, the existence of such experiences, and in the second instance, to deal with it in a way that moves beyond a mobilisation of talks, workshops and policies. One principal adopted a defensive response: 'We will not allow the behaviour of a few malcontents to slander the reputation or disregard notions of a great school' (school correspondence to parents). His language reveals a resistance to the social media accounts, but it also exposes his own inability to understand just how powerfully and systemically race controls the narratives and lives of people. Unsurprisingly, two years later, this same school was called out for 'the lack of black role models' – this time by a group of parents (Thebus 2022) In a letter, the group said the school management had just one 'black' teacher, and one 'black' African educator in a position of subject head out of 18 posts. This is juxtaposed with the 20 ground staff members, all of whom are black males reporting to a white estate manager. This non-representative picture robs the learners of the opportunity to see black adults in roles of authority and leadership (Thebus 2022).

One school instituted three sets of investigations into racism following the disclosures on social media. Although two teachers were disciplined and 'exited' following charges of racism, the school refused to release the reports on the investigations (Bhengu 2021). On the one side, the school justified its refusal by claiming that 'It is important, particularly in the light of the protracted and sensitive nature of the investigative inquiry process, to acknowledge that the reports are subject to legal privilege, which constrains their public dissemination…' On the other side, parents who insisted on seeing the report, stated: 'Reparations cannot take place for victims of racism until there is full disclosure and transparency. It is unfortunate that the school places its reputation and its rights above the protection and rights of children in its care, rather than work together with us to eliminate acts of racism and other forms of intolerance' (Bhengu 2021). To these parents, the custodians of these systems and processes fail to acknowledge their role, fail to change, and remain in positions of power and influence (Bhengu 2021).

Ironically, the reluctance by schools in owning the experiences highlighted in @yousilenceweamplify, stems from a fear of losing or compromising the trust placed in the school by learners and parents. They fear that by acknowledging that some (if not all) of the social media accounts are true, or if they make available the information gleaned from investigations, that those implicated as well as the school will be brought into disrepute. There is therefore a pre-emptive position of protecting the image of the school, so that the epistemic mistrust experienced by some learners, is not transferred onto the school. In other words, the school fears that parents might lose trust in the school's capacity to provide quality

education, which includes how to willingly engage and learn with and from differences. Should parents become aware firstly, that some learners had indeed been discriminated against and treated disgracefully, and secondly, that these experiences might not be isolated or limited to one or two teachers, but symbolic of systemic and structural racism at the school, the possibility exists that the school would lose its standing as being trustworthy.

By resisting the allegations, as the principal has done, or by concealing findings because of their ‘sensitive nature’, the respective schools are exercising ‘trust judgements’ (Levi and Stoker 2000, p. 476). That is, that in order for them to retain the trust of parents and learners, it is better for them to take the risk of not attending to the allegations made by the learners on @yousilenceweamplify, than to risk their trustworthiness by acknowledging that there are indeed incidents of structural racism and othering at the schools. It also reflects a judgement *by* the school *about* the school as being more trustworthy as an institution as opposed to the complaints from a ‘few malcontents’, whose complaints are not only illegitimate, but ‘slander the reputation … of a great school’ (school correspondence to parents).

The learners’ accounts on @yousilenceweamplify provide three critical points for consideration. Firstly, that some learners at historically ‘white’ schools are subjected to immense harm by a few teachers, who should have known better. This raises questions about how schools prepare and cultivate spaces for diverse inclusion. Secondly, that idealised notions about ‘the teacher’ and the presumptions of trust associated schools, must be re-visited. It seems that schools should attend to the matter of epistemic trust in a more pronounced matter, so that it is earned rather than a de facto assumption. And thirdly, there is a dire need for re-prioritising the importance of ethics in teaching in teacher education programmes, and this is where philosophy of education can be of tremendous benefit. Specifically, philosophy of education encourages students and teachers to remove their blinkers, to step away from their preconceived ideas and judgements of the world and those in it, and to question what they know and believe to be true. Following the learners’ accounts in this section, key questions centre around the openness of teachers to consider the existence of multiple ways of being in the world, and to engage from the perspectives of others, which necessarily requires the ability to reflect on existing views and values. Unsurprisingly, philosophy of education can be uncomfortable, because it disrupts a familiarity of thinking and being – provoking teachers or prospective teachers to learn anew, with the possibility of unlearning taken-for-granted assumptions and biases about the world and others.

Philosophical Unlearning and Relearning

Apparent from the accounts on @yousilenceweamplify, as well as continuing reports of racism and discrimination in the media (see Pijoos 2023; O’Regan 2022), is that not all teachers can be trusted to act ethically in relation to their learners, or their profession. Whatever discourses of trust exist at certain schools are not extended to all learners equally and equitably. While some learners can trust in the discretionary powers of the teacher, and in the teacher as de facto trustworthy, others cannot. Instead, markers of race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, and accent are used as indicators and licence for epistemic mistrust. It makes for an immensely challenging and debilitating learning environment.

Typically, those constituted as minority group learners, because they are different to the dominant ‘white’ learner group or unaligned with the historical identity of the school, do not access the school in the same positive way as their’ white’ majority peers. While

'white' learners and parents presume the right to be at these schools and have 'heritage advantage' (Jansen and Kriger 2020) 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian' learners access these spaces with reticence and insecurity. They know that external inclusion in the school, does not necessarily equate to internal inclusion, acceptance, participation, or recognition. For 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian' learners therefore, there is often a much deeper need than for 'white' learners to trust the teacher. They hope and trust that the trust embodied by the teacher, is not misplaced, and they hope that when they are treated badly by learners, that it is the teacher who will do the right thing. Seldom do they expect the teacher to be the problem.

When teachers are guilty of the kinds of incidents, as amplified in the social media accounts, there are two simultaneous betrayals of trust. On one hand, there is the broken trust in relation to the discretionary powers placed in the teacher, as trusted. On the other hand, there is an abuse of trust by the teacher, who is in a position of trust in relation to all learners – something about which she is fully aware – but instead, she chooses to mistrust certain learners, not because of their behaviour or actions, but because of the knowledge and values that they perceivably represent. In this way, the teacher is not prepared to learn from what she does not know; she is not prepared to open herself to new forms of knowledge about and in relation to some of her learners. Moreover, she is inflexible in her attitude, and abuses the trust placed in her by treating certain learners in discriminatory and humiliating ways. As Pierre (2020) notes, epistemic mistrust is often rooted in interpersonal mistrust, and therefore stems from the personal, rather than the professional identities of teachers. Epistemic mistrust, states Pierre (2020, p. 617) is also often accompanied by 'a biased appraisal of false counter-narratives', or 'misinformation processing', leading some teachers to mistrust in the capacity or potential certain learners to achieve or be successful, as captured in another account from @yousilenceweamplify:

> Our history teacher once made the whole class stand after writing a test. She said when she calls out your name you must sit. I was one of 6 who hadn't sat (passed the test) and the only black girl. Then she proceeds to lecture all the white girls about how shameful it is that a black girl did better than them. That it can never be that a black girl did better than a white girl, it's never been seen in the world. I was 14 years old.

Following these discussions, what might be gained from philosophical engagements in the espousal of teaching as a relationship and enactment of trust – one which ensures the flourishing of both learner and teacher? How might philosophy of education assist teacher education programmes in attuning students to an understanding that being trustworthy as teachers resides in self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the differences of, and among others?

Even in the absence of structural racism, such as embodied in apartheid, racism can exist in any diverse context. The more diverse environments or schools are, the greater the chance for racism, misrecognition, and exclusion. South Africa is not unique in burdening its schooling and education systems with the creation and cultivation of a democratic society. This is the case in any democracy (Mintrom 2001). The immense reform measures, which saw the introduction of four iterations of a new curriculum, also involved significant shifts in the role of the teacher. Teachers were no longer constructed as mere transmitters of knowledge. Instead, they were tasked with teaching and democratising learners in preparation for a new kind of society. In addition to teaching a new curriculum they also had to adjust their value system, so that what and how they taught, would bring the Constitution of a democratic society into the life of a classroom (Enslin 2003). For inexplicable

reasons the new democratic government has not stopped to consider the preparedness or willingness of teachers to teach and engage with learners from diverse identities and background. Amid immense policy reforms, none paid critical attention to teacher identities, or the necessity of retraining teachers for desegregated schools. The state continues to trust 'the trusted teacher' to enact and exemplify democratising principles, without pausing to consider that all teachers might not be trustworthy. The reality is that some teachers are not equipped to engage diverse groups of learners; they do not have the requisite skills to ensure that all learners are recognised, included and enjoy a sense of belonging. In sum, they nether have the knowledge, nor the curiosity to engage with diversity. Instead, differences are treated with suspicion and epistemic mistrust.

It is, however important, to note, not as a justification, but as an explanation, that epistemic mistrust is learnt behaviour, often stemming from earlier (childhood) experiences, or the socialisation into certain beliefs about others, which may or not be true. If pre-service teachers have been exposed to a particular home and school environments, which have propagated distorted ideas and opinions of others, then it follows that unless these ideas are contested and disrupted, they will persist, manifesting in misrecognition and epistemic mistrust. While some attitudes can be dismissed as closed-mindedness, these attitudes can easily slip into epistemic mistrust when these attitudes stem from a belief that others are not epistemically authoritative and trustworthy (see McCraw 2015) – so that there is a pre-existing belief about the capacity or potential of learners, based on race, culture or ethnicity, for example. A teacher who believes that 'it can never be that a black girl did better than a white girl', not only carries distorted and shameful understandings of people and race, but harms others through her epistemic mistrust. While the 'black' girl in this scenario might lose her self-esteem and trust in her teacher, the surrounding 'white' girls are initiated into constructions of white supremacy. In turn, all the learners in this teacher's class are immersed into a culture of epistemic mistrust. I highlight this to show just how powerful teachers can be, and to contend that teacher education programmes cannot be limited to introducing pre-service teachers into philosophical perspectives and debates on teaching pedagogies, as if teaching is contained and decontextualised.

Instead, teacher education programmes need to start from what is already known, not as policy and theory, but as lived and social reality. On the one hand, we know that democratic South Africa's schools remain segregated along racial and socio-economic lines (Gruijters et al 2022). We also know that desegregation has not translated into integration in schools (Naidoo et al. 2018; Soudien and McKinney 2016). These are the outward forms of schools and schooling, which cannot be separated from the content and practice of education. On the other hand, we recognise that there is no such thing as 'the teacher', with idealised commitments to learners or policies. There are only *teachers*, whose teachers' identities are deeply embedded in their own personal beliefs and values, and who, at times, struggle in reconciling these, with the complexities of learner diversity.

With these challenges in mind, firstly, it is helpful and necessary, I would argue, to start teacher education programmes by inviting pre-service teachers to reflect upon themselves What do they consider as fundamental truths about themselves, and the world in which they live? How do they conceive of themselves in relation to this world and to others? Ahmed (2003) makes us aware of how our truths contain us, so that our truths become who we are. And yet, she contends, 'The truth of my experiences' is not 'the given; 'it is, however, *my* given' (Ahmed 2003, p. 377). Hence, do pre-service teachers recognise that their fundamental truths are just one set of millions of other fundamental truths, that there are other perspectives on the world and on others, as well as on them? It is easy, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) points out to be caught in a world of perception, which prevents us from

imagining a different kind of world, and holds us back from being conscious of the world. Philosophy of education invites us to traverse worlds, and to engage from different perspectives. This is not only a matter of teachers, for example, putting themselves in learners' shoes. To do so, explain Mackenzie and Scully (2007), would simply mean to imagine oneself as differently situated, while still projecting one's own perspective onto others, without morally engaging with them. Rather what is needed is a moral imagination, which, means recognising that learners are different, and teachers should imaginatively engage with their perceptions and experiences.

Secondly, as they are introduced to educational theories and invited to ponder on the nature and purpose of education, pre-service teachers can be made aware of how different forms of knowledge are useful to make sense education in relation to the world. In this regard, emphasis should be placed on the fact that teachers do not only prepare learners to be knowledgeable about a particular subject, but the subject has to be understood in relation to the world in which it exists. Stated differently, the purpose of education is to prepare young people *how to be* in this world, and with others. The nature of this preparation, therefore, has to draw on multiple forms of knowledge so that pre-service teachers recognise that other forms of knowledge matter. This includes moving beyond western canons, discarding binary divisions between 'white' and 'black', as well as western hegemonies of knowledge, which are intent upon subjugating indigenous forms of knowledge and ways of life. For pre-service teachers, these potential discussions, deliberations, and reflections can provide crucial points of learning not only in relation to their choice of profession, but in terms of who they are, what they know, and why some knowledge matters to them, and others do not. To de Sousa Santos (2018, p. 33), all knowledges 'are testimonies since what they know of reality (their active dimension) is always reflected back in what they reveal about the subject of this knowledge (their subjective dimension).'

Thirdly, confronting epistemic mistrust, so that pre-service teachers might open themselves to newness and difference in others and in the world, depends on an acknowledgement of multiple truths and knowledges. It also depends on a willingness to unlearn and relearn, so that rigidity in thinking and being is consciously abandoned. Matsuo (2018) explains that the process of unlearning involves three assumptions. Firstly, that individual unlearning is a conscious process of giving up knowledge, values, or behaviours. Secondly, that what is unlearned is not permanently lost, but it is not used by an individual. And thirdly, that the abandoning of existing knowledge, skills, and behaviours often occurs simultaneously while acquiring new ones (Matsuo 2018). Learning and unlearning are not identical processes, instead, states Matsuo, unlearning is a key step within learning. When an individual acquires knowledge and skills by transforming, updating, and refining the old ones, this type of learning involves unlearning, and can be associated with exploratory activities, including experimenting with new approaches and reconsidering existing beliefs (Matsuo 2018). Approaching the dilemma of epistemic mistrust, in this manner, can serve as powerful departures for an interrogation of stereotypes, myths, and prejudices.

Fourthly, promoting trust in teaching, and between teachers and learners, relies on cultivating a classroom of inclusion and belonging. When learners feel that they are seen and recognised with and in their differences, and they are brought into the discourse of teaching and learning, rather than excluded and marginalised, they feel connected and safe. Teachers can do this by being curious about who learners are. Freire (2001, p.16) describes curiosity 'as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes. an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive'. By being curious about learners, their interests, likes and dislikes, a teacher cultivates a classroom setting

where learners and the teacher can begin to gain understanding and see diversity as an asset for increasing knowledge and broadening perspectives on the world. Dunne (in this SI) explains that because learners 'come through the school gates with irreducibly complex life stories, inner lifeworlds, and clusters of fluid dispositions and characterological, cognitive, axiological, and ontological potentialities, most of which do not always fall into neat predetermined categories, it soon becomes clear to see the extent to which Verstehen [understanding] is required in the successful navigation of modern learning environments'. Epistemic mistrust arises when these life stories are discounted, or worse, ridiculed. Concomitantly, epistemic trust can become entrenched in classrooms when the inner lifeworlds of learners are not only recognised by teachers, but also included in teaching content and classroom deliberations.

Being curious about others lends itself to questions and responses, it also tells learners that the teacher has an interest in them, holding the potential for dialogues, and hence a process of teaching and learning. Freire (2001, p. 18) notes that 'dialogue must require an ever-present curiosity about the object of knowledge. Thus, dialogue is never an end in itself but a means to develop a better comprehension about the object of knowledge'. Being curious and cultivating dialogues with learners, as well as among learners are not separate practices, rather they should be embedded in the pedagogical habits of teachers. The more learners and teachers alike are initiated into the habit of curiosity, the greater the opportunities for dialogue and understanding, and the greater the potential for promoting trust in, through and with teaching and learning. Moreover, when learners experience their teachers as trustworthy, they feel secure in being who they are, they have the confidence to actively participate in their own learning, and they come into the learning as equal to all their peers. Here, the point raised Di Muzio et al. (in this SI) is especially pertinent that if 'we see education as forming and not merely informing then teachers aim to foster the capacities and discernment to enable their students to live good lives. The promotion of trust, therefore, is critical not only to the teaching and learning encounter, but also to the self-perceptions and esteems of learners.

In summary, even in the absence of epistemic mistrust, teacher education programmes in South Africa (and I would imagine elsewhere) do not sufficiently focus on teacher identity and their judgements on learners and learning. Teachers are not mythical beings; they are not immune to the kinds of prejudices that sustained apartheid for 46 years; they are also not above the racism which persists in most societies. Unless teacher education programmes create the space for teachers to reflect on themselves, in relation to the world, and in relation to those they teach, and for *all* of whom they need to trustworthy, epistemic trust cannot be confronted. For teachers to be deserving of the trust vested in them, they have to have self-knowledge, and if not knowledge about others, then a willingness to recognise that other ways of knowing, being and acting exist. And if teachers wish to enact their trust with all learners, then they should be open to learning from learners, so that both (teachers and learners) can benefit from a discourse of trust.

In conclusion, most of us would agree that regardless of its geographical location, teaching is fundamentally a relational practice, which is constantly changing and thus beset with moral ambiguity (Orchard et al. 2016). The examples of epistemic injustice highlighted in this article might have emanated from a South African context, but learners' decisions to take to social media, under a banner of '@yousilenceweamplify', was inspired by greater global calls for '#BlackLivesMatter'. Trust is immensely important in educational settings; its compromise or violation can hold profound implications not only for learners' inclusion and participation in their own learning, but also for how they see themselves and their self-worth. The promotion of trust, as a philosophical endeavour, holds the potential to enhance

the teaching–learning encounter by including all learners; to instil a sense of confidence in learners by acknowledging their differences as an asset to broadening the educational experience; and to foster social cohesion by addressing and countering inequality and discrimination. The experiences in South African schools are not unique. Issues of racism, othering and exclusion are as pervasive in relatively nascent democracies, such as South Africa, as they are in more established liberal democracies. The importance and promotion of trust, therefore, is translatable across diverse geopolitical and educational settings, and can facilitate engagements with and understandings of difference and diversity.

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