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“But What Should I Do in my Methodology Chapter?” Promoting Philosophy as Legitimate Educational Research

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Article abstract

In this paper, I argue that the dominant assumption that educational research means empirical research narrows the range of possibilities for educational research. More specifically, research methods courses and textbooks exclude philosophy of education as a viable way of going about educational research, which limits what we can know about education by predetermining what counts as a legitimate way of doing educational research. My concern is that the assumption that educational research is limited to qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research marginalizes other ways of knowing. I begin by exploring the problem of “tacit empiricism,” the assumption that educational research means empirical research, which I explore in several educational research methods textbooks and course syllabi. I then critique some underlying epistemological assumptions in empirical research, and lament that the proliferation of qualitative methods has not translated into the inclusion of philosophy as a legitimate way to do educational research. I suggest that the requirement that educational research have a practical “impact,” based on a limited notion of what counts as “evidence,” is a key reason why philosophy of education is marginalized. This leads to a consideration of the often-overlooked AERA “Standards for Reporting on Humanities-Oriented Research,” which can help promote philosophical research when it comes to evaluating submissions to educational journals or conferences. I then argue that it is important to rethink the word “research” itself so that it includes reading, writing and thinking. In conclusion, I suggest a few practical ways in which philosophy of education can be promoted in the face of these challenges.

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"But What Should I Do in my Methodology Chapter?" Promoting Philosophy as Legitimate Educational Research

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In this paper, I argue that the dominant assumption that educational research means empirical research narrows the range of possibilities for educational research. More specifically, research methods courses and textbooks exclude philosophy of education as a viable way of going about educational research, which limits what we can know about education by predetermining what counts as a legitimate way of doing educational research. My concern is that the assumption that educational research is limited to qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research marginalizes other ways of knowing. I begin by exploring the problem of "tacit empiricism," the assumption that educational research means empirical research, which I explore in several educational research methods textbooks and course syllabi. I then critique some underlying epistemological assumptions in empirical research, and lament that the proliferation of qualitative methods has not translated into the inclusion of philosophy as a legitimate way to do educational research. I suggest that the requirement that educational research have a practical "impact," based on a limited notion of what counts as "evidence," is a key reason why philosophy of education is marginalized. This leads to a consideration of the often-overlooked AERA "Standards for Reporting on Humanities-Oriented Research," which can help promote philosophical research when it comes to evaluating submissions to educational journals or conferences. I then argue that it is important to rethink the word "research" itself so that it includes reading, writing and thinking. In conclusion, I suggest a few practical ways in which philosophy of education can be promoted in the face of these challenges.

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that the dominant assumption that educational research means empirical research narrows the range of possibilities for educational research. More specifically, research methods courses and textbooks exclude philosophy of education as a viable way of going about educational research, which limits what we can know about education by predetermining what counts as a legitimate way of doing educational research. Too often, faculties of education succumb to narrow conceptions of what constitutes legitimate educational research in the preparation of their graduate students. The straitjacket of the methodological structure one must adhere to may produce research that is not as engaging or significant as it might be.

More specifically, my concern is that the assumption that educational research is limited to qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research marginalizes other ways of knowing, in particular the kind of humanities-oriented research frequently employed in the study of philosophy of education. It is important that philosophers of education develop persuasive arguments to defend what our methods offer educational research, to present an alternative to dominant assumptions about the superiority of empirical research in the field in general, and in graduate student training in particular. In the first weeks after starting a new position, a

student who had come to write a master's thesis under my supervision stated that they would like to change their topic (the role of Shakespeare in the provincial English curriculum) because the required educational research methods course led them to believe that a research project required students to collect their own original data. They informed me they were changing thesis topics because they wanted to "do research," and unless they collected data they weren't doing research. This is the reason I was drawn to write about this topic. While many philosophers of education talk about methodology, epistemology, and the state of the discipline, the impact of methods courses and textbooks has not been adequately addressed.

I won't engage here in an extended or broad-based defense of the value of philosophy of education, despite the fact that philosophy of education is indeed a marginalized field within faculties of education. My focus is rather on a key contributing factor to its marginalization in educational research specifically. As I illustrate below, when students encounter research methods courses and required textbooks, they are "streamed" away from philosophy of education as a viable way to conduct research. In fact, these courses and textbooks convey the notion that philosophy of education is *not* research, just mere speculation or arbitrary opinion. But philosophy is more rigorous than writing op-eds in the newspaper. According to the dominant research paradigms presented to graduate students, only qualitative and quantitative (and perhaps increasingly mixed) methods are considered forms of legitimate research. I want to encourage us to rethink educational research, to "focus on the marginal and sometimes forgotten dimensions of what educational research is, what it might be for, what it can achieve and where there are limits that researchers should be mindful of as well" (Biesta, 2020, p. 3).

I begin by exploring the problem of "tacit empiricism," the assumption that educational research means empirical research, which I explore in several educational research methods textbooks and course syllabi. I then critique some underlying epistemological assumptions in empirical research, and lament that the proliferation of qualitative methods has not translated into the inclusion of philosophy as a legitimate way to do educational research. I then argue that there is a close link between one's conception of education and the selection of the most appropriate method to study education; research method and conception of education align. I then critique the notion that "data" gets us closer to what is "really going on" in schools, whereas philosophy is construed as second-order removed and as a barrier between the researcher and the object of research. I respond to this problematic but prevalent notion by suggesting that theory actually helps bring us closer to "what is," which leads into a discussion of what a philosophical "method" might look like. I suggest that the requirement that educational research have a practical "impact," based on a limited notion of what counts as "evidence," is a key reason why philosophy of education is marginalized. This leads to a consideration of the often-overlooked AERA "Standards for Reporting on Humanities-Oriented Research," which can help promote philosophical research when it comes to evaluating submissions to educational journals or conferences. I then argue that it is important to rethink the word "research" itself so that it includes reading, writing and thinking. In conclusion, I suggest a few practical ways in which philosophy of education can be promoted in the face of these challenges.

The marginalization of humanities-oriented research isn't unique to philosophy of education. It reflects a larger trend: the marginalization of the humanities in universities in general. But methods courses and textbooks are some of the most impactful ways in which philosophy of education continues to be marginalized. And addressing them may be some of the more effective ways in which philosophy of education can be promoted.

Methodolatry and the Problem of "Tacit Empiricism"

My concern in this paper is with the dominance of empirical assumptions in educational research methodology textbooks and (often required) graduate courses in educational research methods, because they convey the notion that educational research means empirical research, and that the only legitimate way to do educational research is through data collection—qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods. Often the randomized control trial in the medical sciences is held up as exemplary. I argue that the dominance of this notion, sometimes called "tacit empiricism," is a key factor in the discourse around what constitutes research methodology and ultimately behind the continued marginalization of philosophy of education. I'm primarily

interested in this question in the context of *graduate* education programs—though the issues I discuss impact educational research as a whole (Young, 2001), as well as the status of philosophy of education.

In their study of student research projects in graduate education programs and the textbooks that guide them, Gibson and Garside identify a "tacit empiricism" (2017, p. 117); tacit because it is simply assumed that research means empirical research. From their earliest studies, future educational researchers are introduced to this notion (indoctrinated?) and, as a result, are less likely to pursue non-empirical research. What graduate students study in the earliest stages of their program has an immense impact on the kind of researchers they become and the assumptions about research they adopt. At this key stage in a student's career, when they are still developing their own intellectual beliefs, they are perhaps more influenceable than at other stages of their studies.

Moreover, even if nonempirical research were introduced to students at the beginning of their graduate studies, terminological issues immediately arise. What is the best way to refer to these methods that are currently overlooked in research methods textbooks? A few titles come to mind: humanities-based method, argumentative method (though that implies that empirical research doesn't involve argument), conceptual method, interpretative method (though empirical research requires the interpretation of data), or book-based research. All of these are imperfect in some way.

Examples may help illuminate: If a student planned a project that applied Paulo Freire's conceptions of oppression and consciousness-raising in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) to critique Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences in the book by that name, most educational research courses and textbooks would lead them to believe that this endeavor would not count as legitimate "research." The same could be said of a more traditionally "philosophical" project, putting Dewey in conversation with Rousseau, or Plato with Wollstonecraft. Such a project would only count as research if, for example, the student altered their project in order to conduct empirical research; for example, interviews and surveys with teachers.

In light of these trends in graduate education, I argue that one of the most significant limitations to the field of philosophy of education today occurs not because of any shortcomings in its core ideas, arguments, claims or other contributions. Instead, I argue, the field is limited for methodological reasons: the prevalence of empirically oriented educational research methodology textbooks and syllabi. The effect is that many graduate students in education are steered away from philosophy education and encouraged to develop mistaken assumptions about the irrelevance and inferiority of philosophy. Philosophy is not even an option because philosophy does not meet the epistemological criteria for empirical research. As Linda Stone notes, "What graduate students learn determines what kind of researchers they become" (2006, p. 528). Our graduate education programs are, therefore, systematically steering students away from nonempirical research.

What is the effect of the dominance of these textbooks and courses? First, students are led to believe that research means empirical research, that the only way to approach their own research projects is empirically. Second, the dominant paradigm privileges a certain way of knowing and marginalizes and delegitimizes other ways of knowing. As a result, it narrows the field of educational research and narrows what can be known about education. Finally, perhaps most problematically from the perspective of philosophy of education, graduate training limits students' options and steers students away from philosophy of education.

This paper explores how best to defend the value of *not* doing empirical work—even arguing that philosophical research *is* empirical work. Our "data sets" are books, ideas, the imagination, and the range of human possibilities. Our "method" consists of arguments, reasoning, induction, and the exercise of writing itself (Ruitenberg, 2009). In order to preserve and develop philosophy of education as an intellectual pursuit, the field must justify itself as a rigorous, normative academic undertaking, not mere arbitrary opinion. Philosophy *is* empirical in its own way, and educational research should not be limited to empirical work as graduate students are routinely taught.

The repeated and unreflective use of a specific method is called methodolatry, "a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told" (Mattern, 2013, Data Politics section, para. 4; Rorty, 1999, p. xxi). Methodolatry turns method into a formulaic and mechanistic procedure, which becomes a repeatable and incontestable template (Phillips, 2006). Linda Stone argues that it "turns 'how to do research' into valuing method as technology for its own sake, and thus into technologization" (2006, p. 527). Our current preoccupation with empirical data is almost fetishistic: whoever has the biggest dataset wins! But it's not about how good your data is; it's about what you do with it. Standish

notes the danger of empirical research when it becomes its own specialized and separate niche: "The professionalization of empirical educational research has led to the development of its own specialized language and methodology in such a way as to demarcate it from broader enquiry into education" (2010, p. 507).

Kerdeman (2015) discusses two studies of doctoral educational research seminars, by Metz (2001) and Lesko et al. (1998), focusing on the value of promoting self-doubt among graduate students, and aims to "engage students with epistemological controversies and methodological differences" (Kerdeman, 2015, p. 737) that guide their own intended research projects. Such seminars are a rare but promising way to encourage broader thinking about research but still work within the framework of tacit empiricism. Metz notes that "one of the critical problems in a field with so many different traditions, purposes, and foci, is the search for appropriate ways to design graduate education with enough depth and breadth to prepare creative and effective new researchers in the field" (p. 12). However, Metz notes that she is a qualitative researcher and that she has partnered with a quantitative researcher. These studies may encourage self-doubt but still assume that educational research means empirical research, a core assumption left unquestioned.

Ironically, the values of tacit empiricism and methodolatry are not backed up by empirical evidence, and yet they persist as a form of what are called "zombie ideas"—those lifeless conceptual assumptions that continue in practice and widespread acceptance despite literature that debunks them (Peters & Nagel, 2020), which I will discuss in greater detail below. The unquestioned assumption that empirical methodology produces the best research severely limits the kinds of questions that can be asked and answered. Linda Stone notes that "a methodological emphasis in research training turns process into narrowly construed preoccupation with technology that in turn portends limited research results" (2006, p. 528). Overreliance on empirical methodology is akin to a carpenter saying they only use certain kinds of tools regardless of what the job demands: "I'm a hammer carpenter" or "I'm a saw carpenter" (Eisenhart, 2005, p. 250). A good carpenter will use all the tools at their disposal to solve the problem at hand. In the same way, an educational researcher should be as open to a philosophical approach as an empirical one. Rather than letting method drive a research project, all research should start with a question, a puzzle, a doubt.

Textbooks, Syllabi, and Textbooks-as-Syllabi

Most graduate students in education are introduced to educational research in research methodology courses, most of which include required textbooks on qualitative and quantitative methods. These books sell in massive quantities for hundreds of dollars each and are hugely lucrative for the publishing industry and individual authors. Well-known examples include Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019), Creswell and Guetterman (2018), Mertler (2022) and, for qualitative research in particular, Denzin and Lincoln's *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2023). The vast majority of students learning about educational research will have read these or similar books.

Most research methodology textbooks of this ilk not only fail to acknowledge the possibility of a philosophical approach to educational research, but actively teach students that research can only be conducted through empirical methods. I'll comment on a few of the better-known and more widely used methodology textbooks.

Perhaps the most widely sold and assigned research methods textbook is Creswell and Guetterman's (2018) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, which states that "research is a process in which you engage in a small set of logical steps to understand a topic or issue. [So far so good.] You can approach research in two ways—through a quantitative study or a qualitative study—depending on the type of problem you need to research" (p. 2). Creswell and Guetterman then proceed to differentiate between the two. It is hard to think of two sentences that have done more harm to the legitimacy, salience, recognition, and popularity of philosophy of education.[1]

Creswell and Guetterman state that research consists of three steps: "Pose a question; Collect data to answer the question; Present an answer to the question" (p. 3). This simplistic and overly formulaic account

[1] The edition I reference is from 2018 but is the 6th edition. The first edition was published in 2001—but many other texts predate that!

not only leaves out theory and the theoretical framework necessary to guide the project, but implicitly assumes that data means empirical data. It must be acknowledged that philosophy does appear in this book, both as a subheading and in the index. However, it is only included in service of empirical approaches. According to Creswell and Guetterman, philosophy and "philosophical worldviews" (p. 6) can help one determine which empirical methodology is most appropriate for one's study. Creswell and Guetterman continue: "We suggest that individuals prepare a research proposal or plan. Make the larger philosophical ideas they espouse explicit. This information will help explain why they chose qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches for their research" (p. 6). According to Creswell and Guetterman, philosophy can only help strengthen empirical projects; otherwise, it has no inherent value. He implies that educational researchers need only be "philosophical" when picking their method—not when they are studying education itself.

Craig Mertler opens *Introduction to Educational Research* (2022) by stating that, "although educational research can be a fairly straightforward process, some educators have preconceptions—or, perhaps more appropriately, misconceptions—about exactly what constitutes educational research. … As a process, educational research is a scientific endeavor. As we previously discussed, educational research closely parallels the scientific method" (p. 6).

Gay et al. claim that "educational research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of educational problems. The goal of educational research is essentially the same as the goal of all science: to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena—in this case, educational phenomena" (2009, p. 5). Comparisons to chemical reactions follow. Similarly, Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) title section I of *Research Methods for Education* "Scientific Inquiry," and chapter 1 "Introduction to Scientific Thinking," and on the first page claim that "teaching is a scientific endeavor" (p. 3). I will say more below regarding the impact of scientific demands.

The Basics of Social Science Research (2017) by Earl Babbie includes a subheading that reads, "Theory: Not Philosophy or Belief," (p. 8) in which philosophy is equated with belief, which is equated with arbitrary or unsubstantiated personal opinion. Babbie criticizes the way in which "social philosophers liberally mixed their observations of what happened around them, their speculations about why, and their *ideas* about how things ought to be" (p. 8). To Babbie, it is better to be value-neutral, to collect the data and then "let the data speak," without allowing philosophy to corrupt the process. I'll say more below regarding the assumption that education is best studied as a social science and the aspiration of value neutrality.

In the "Handbook of Teaching and Learning Social Research Methods," a study of how research methods are taught, Brindle and Lewthwaite (2023) argue that textbook design and norms iteratively shape, constrain and respond to contemporary ideas of methods and underlying assumptions about what is or isn't legitimate research. They account for many types of learner diversity and cultural diversity and the necessity to consider a range of methodologies. Furthermore, they recognize the powerful impact that textbooks can have, drawing from Bourdieu's notion of symbolic and cultural capital (p. 409), yet still perpetuate the notion that "research methods" means empirical research.

In critiquing these commonly used books, my concern is not about the prevalence of scientism or positivism, evident in many of the textbooks I've just mentioned, though many philosophers of education have mounted substantial critiques of the prevalence and persistence of positivism in educational research (Phillips, 2009; Howe, 2009, 2002; Baez & Boyles, 2009). My point is rather that philosophy of education can and should do more than critique the epistemological presuppositions that underlie empirical research methods. Philosophy is a legitimate method unto itself despite what these books tell our graduate students. As long as textbooks convey the notion that educational research means empirical research, and required research methods courses don't counter that assumption, many research possibilities and new ways of thinking about education will be marginalized.

It is possible to observe the same trends and patterns by examining the evidence presented by graduate research methods course syllabi. I should acknowledge that it is ironic to present an empirical study to support my arguments about the dominance of empiricism! Or an empirical study of the marginalization of philosophy. But it is important to assert that philosophers of education can do empirical research—especially when it comes to philosophy of education itself. And especially if it shows just how marginalized philosophy of education is. A fine example of empirical research about philosophy of education is found in Mathew Hayden's (2011) study

of the top philosophy of education journals. But as I've already suggested, when a research question demands empirical evidence, one should proceed empirically.

I purposively gathered syllabi from all the graduate programs of education in Canada focusing on educational research courses, which revealed that only 2 of 115 course syllabi even mentioned non-empirical, humanities-based research or philosophy as a potential approach. All others focused almost exclusively on the main textbooks mentioned above, and have no other readings beyond the textbook, which is read chapter by chapter. In other words, the syllabus and textbook are almost identical; it could be said that the methods textbooks are in fact methods courses.

These textbooks and methods courses, in partnership, conspire to marginalize philosophy of education by, from the earliest stages of study, directing students implicitly and explicitly, towards empirical research projects. This not only drives students towards such empirical research for their own studies, but practically ensures they come to see philosophy of education as a non-viable option for their own research endeavours.

The fact that these methods courses are mandatory in most departments suggests that students are presented with a "hidden curriculum" about what counts as legitimate research. Hand in hand with the virtual elimination of philosophy of education courses at the undergraduate and teacher education level, these course syllabi make it clear why philosophy of education continues to be marginalized.

Proliferation of Methods—Except Philosophy

I want to acknowledge that many methodology textbooks do profess to move beyond positivism or the randomized control model by extoling the value of qualitative methods. However, even the descriptions of these less "scientific" approaches *also* direct students away from potential philosophical approaches to educational research. On the first page of their textbook, Cohen et al. claim that "the nature and foundations of educational research have witnessed a proliferation of paradigms over time" (2017, p. 1), yet while qualitative research methodologies have proliferated in recent years, as evidenced in the many textbooks and new journals, it is striking that this proliferation has not translated into an increased acceptance of philosophical approaches; dethroning positivism and quantitative approaches has not, at least so far, created any space for philosophy to flourish.

Qualitative research adopts a posture of considerable epistemological humility in claiming that we are all just "telling a story," that even facts and numbers are just "telling a story." Although words like "narrative" and "story" proliferate in these textbooks, often a "story" or an account of personal experience is construed as an incontestable empirical fact. In this way, qualitative data represents a new form of positivism, with the researcher claiming simply to present "what is"—without letting theory interfere or intervene or disrupt or cloud a pure, unmediated encounter with reality. As Elizabeth St. Pierre notes, "it is ironic that qualitative methodology, which was invented as an interpretive critique of logical empiricism, should now be shot through with positivist concepts and practices" (2016, p. 118).

But what is the difference between a story and a theory? All stories have a theory that underlies them, and that they communicate implicitly. New forms of qualitative research are just as susceptible to philosophical critiques as positivism, but methodology textbooks fail to acknowledge this fact.

The emergence of increasingly widely adopted research methods such as narrative inquiry, arts-based research, ethnographic research, indigenous methodology, grounded theory, action research, feminist research methods, and many more are deemed deserving of separate chapters or individual attention in many of the textbooks mentioned above. Furthermore, there are many new journals that focus on qualitative research, some focused on subcategories within qualitative research.[2] Ironically, many of these new approaches draw extensively from philosophy, especially postmodernism and poststructuralism. However, none advocate a

[2] See, for example, the Sage journals *Qualitative Research*, the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, the *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, and in education specifically *Qualitative Research in Education*, the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: Theory and Practice*, as well as journals dedicated to specific types of qualitative research in education such as *Educational Action Research*, the *Journal of Teacher Action Research*, and *Ethnography and Education*.

philosophical approach to the study of education; as with quantitative methodologies, philosophy is only deemed relevant insofar as it can help determine which qualitative method one should choose.

Because of its concern with discourse and analysis of words, an argument could be made that philosophy is simply a subcategory within qualitative research. This would imply that philosophical texts could be read and analyzed using the same methods of "discourse analysis" as interview transcripts. But this is an oversimplification that does a disservice to the role philosophy can play in deepening our understanding of complex educational issues. One can only imagine trying to "code" Plato's Republic.

I want to emphasize that there is nothing inherently problematic about research that adopts the particular epistemological assumptions, views about knowledge, or ways of knowing advanced by the most prevalent methodology textbooks. However, it is equally important to emphasize (though the fact is often overlooked) that the dominance of tacit empiricism sets the stage for the exclusion and omission of philosophy to the detriment of novice researchers and the field at large.

"Methodology Wars"

Philosophy of education has much to offer methodological debates in the field of educational research, sometimes called the "methodology wars" (Bredo, 2009), as found in such well-known journals as *Educational Researcher*. Philosophers of education explore claims about certainty, truth, reality, experience, phenomena, method, and so on. They have provided many substantial critiques of key epistemological assumptions that characterize positivism and quantitative methodology, including: that objectivity is possible and desirable; that objectivity gives legitimacy; that direct observation gives reliable knowledge; that there is such a thing as discrete sense datum; that non-observational knowledge is just speculative, arbitrary and opinion-based; that the greater the distance from the object, the greater the epistemological legitimacy; that facts and data can be studied without the influence of theory; that the "real" world is accessible to us if we just find the right methodology (Biesta, 2009, 2020; Bredo, 2006, 2009; Howe, 2009; Phillips, 2005, 2006; Ruitenberg, 2009; Baez & Boyles, 2009).

Some have critiqued the rigid boundary between qualitative and quantitative research (Howe, 1988, 2009). While I agree it's important to critique false or problematic dichotomies that characterize empirical research, focusing on the rigidity recenters empirical research rather than promoting philosophy as a viable alternative. Furthermore, it's unlikely the rigid divide leads to the exclusion of philosophy of education; even if the divide were seen as more porous, or if mixed methods were more widely adopted, the dominance of empiricism would continue.

The issue of the dominance of tacit empiricism may reflect the interconnection of methodology and status. Given that science plays a role in determining what is valid and legitimate, it is about not just knowledge but also status (Aronowitz, 1996; Ashman 2001). Becher (2001) studies how academic disciplines position themselves within universities according to various epistemological criteria. In response to these pressures, those of us who study education emphasize the firm empirical foundations of our conclusions in order for education to be taken as a serious, legitimate discipline. In the university context, where "soft" humanities fields like philosophy are often marginalized and deemed less worthy of staffing and research funding, education must strive to liken itself to the hard sciences to ensure its survival. The marginalization of the humanities within the university in recent years has been widely documented in both academic and public-facing research and needs no repetition or elaboration here. Suffice it to say that not only is education a marginalized and low-status field within the modern university (Labaree, 2006), but philosophy of education is further marginalized within it. Epistemological struggles for status, recognition, and legitimacy are a key force behind the dominance of tacit empiricism in research methods courses and syllabi and its rejection of philosophical approaches.

What Kind of "Object" Is Education? Education as Art or Science

The anxiety that faculties of education feel about their status within the academy extends to their disciplinary identity as art, science, or something in between. Claudia Ruitenberg notes that "education is commonly seen

as a social science, rather than as a field of theories, politics and practices that can be approached in a variety of ways, with perspectives *from* the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities" (2009, p. 2). This results in a kind of "status anxiety," a desire to be seen as a legitimate "scientific" discipline (Feuer et al., 2002). This anxiety leads to an overemphasis on method.

Fenstermacher contends that philosophers of education ought to engage in "social science (of sorts)" (2002, p. 347). One of the reasons philosophy as a way to conduct educational research is marginalized is because it espouses humanistic modes of inquiry, while education more often seeks to present itself as a type of social science or even as natural science. While educational research certainly *can* investigate measurable and predictable phenomena in a controlled environment in the mode of hard science, Smeyers and Smith invite us to think of educational research as "closer to the Arts in its approach than to the physical sciences." They ask, "how might things look different if literary criticism rather than physics was our paradigm of knowledge?" (2014, p. 93). These broader disciplinary anxieties extend to the methodological loyalties of the individual researcher. The method one picks says a great deal about the particular conception of education one is working with; there is an alignment between method and object. The method you choose says much not only about your own epistemological presuppositions but also about your own conception of education and its place within the academy as a field of study.

Debates about methodology, not just discipline, are doubly significant, as they extend beyond the realm of methodology into the actual "object" or topic that research is focused on: education itself. What I'm getting at is the notion that the methodology that is applied to education reveals much about the knowledge that is being sought as well as about education itself. For example, is education like building a bridge, akin to engineering, a mechanistic "black box" with inputs that go in and outputs that go out, in a way that can be measured, controlled and predicted? Or is education more akin to an art like painting, in which there is a great deal of unpredictability and uniqueness? The way a researcher answers that question will impact the method they use to study educational activities.

Second-Order Removed? "Let Theory Speak"

Beyond questions of method and discipline—the framing of educational research—it is also crucial to consider the object of education research. Does empirical research help us get closer to "what's really going on in schools?" From the perspective of qualitative research, philosophy may appear to be "second-order removed," one step further away from "reality" and therefore a less reliable indicator of "the truth," however we might define it. Empirical research is construed as an unmediated encounter with "what is" that produces incontestable data through close observation. Graduate students exclaim, "I'm tired of all this theory and different peoples' opinions, I want to find out what's *really* going on in schools." Schools are seen as a place to "test" theory in order to see whether it's right. Even qualitative research may succumb ironically to a new form of dogmatism, in which quotes and observations become irrefutable data or fact. By contrast, philosophy is construed as mere arbitrary personal opinion, less valuable because further away from the reality of what's going on in schools. I want to suggest that philosophy actually helps ensure that one is not unknowingly directed by prior assumptions—a methodological pitfall that undermines empiricism's claim to truth and accuracy.

There is a mistaken notion that the self-conscious subject can access—if adequately aware of the contingency of knowing, and adequately self-reflective regarding the role of their own subjectivity in the knowing process—the truth of events and experience without the need for theory, avoiding theory's corrupting effects. But theory is not an impediment to an otherwise pure and unmediated relationship in which we can be sure the object presents itself clearly and unambiguously to us. Theory is not an imposition or an obstruction between us as viewer, reader, observer, and what is: the object, the subject, the student, the teacher. I argue instead that theory helps bring us closer to what is, to reveal what might otherwise be missed. While the research hostile to philosophy proclaims, "Let the data speak!" and "Don't impose your theory upon the data!", Hanson notes in his book on scientific discovery that "all data are theory laden" (1958, p. 46). Further, Karl Popper argues that "there are no uninterpreted visual sense data … whatever is 'given' to us is already interpreted, decoded" (1976, p. 139). Thus: "Let theory speak!"

While it is preferable to "avoid theoretical jargon," it does not follow that one's work is uninfluenced by theory or closer to what's going on in schools when such language is excised from academic writing. Theory is always already present in research. Even those with little interest in exploring theory are still influenced by it; they have a predetermined theoretical framework whether they are aware of it or not. Perhaps we can ask not "if" but "*where* does the question of theory come up in your research?" (Biesta, 2020, p. 46). Since theory is always already there, we need philosophy so we can be aware of the theory that we bring to the educational questions we research.

Philosophy as "Method"

I want to differentiate between philosophy *in* versus philosophy *as* educational research. By *in* I mean the use of philosophy to help improve the overall quality of empirical educational research in general, as discussed in the "methodology wars" section above. In contrast, by *as* I mean philosophy itself as a distinct and unique method or way of doing educational research. The question of what exactly a philosophical "method" is can't be fully tackled in this paper, but a few guiding remarks are in order.

While I hope to have made the case that philosophy has been unjustifiably marginalized in educational research, there are still important questions to ask about how good philosophical research ought to be conducted in education. Philosophers of education such as Claudia Ruitenberg have published on how to "do" philosophy of education, asking *What Do Philosophers of Education Do? (And How Do They Do It?)* (2010). What exactly is the "method" of philosophy of education?

It is important to stress that philosophers have a "method" as much as more empirical researchers do, despite what research methods textbooks would have our graduate students think. I put the word method in quotes because research methods textbooks and syllabi have become so dominant that they seem to have a monopoly on the word. But countless treatises by philosophers overtly and extensively discuss method (Descartes, Collingwood, Gadamer, Feyeraband, etc.), although all canonical philosophers to varying extents reflect on how they themselves go about their project even when they do not explicitly mention "method." From Plato's *Apology* to the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Method* (Cappelen et al, 2016) to the journal dedicated to the topic, *Metaphilosophy*, there are abundant explorations of what comprises the philosophical method. These works examine the nature of reason, intuition, thought, critique, dialogue, structures of argument, and textual analysis. They delineate clear, reproducible methodological approaches that could be taught to graduate students if methodology courses chose to address them.

Educational research would not be any better if philosophical research in education were done in ways incoherent, vague, banal, overly technical, poorly argued, verbose, intentionally obscure, or exclusively for others already immersed and trained in specific philosophical debates. Furthermore, it is not necessary to advocate for the preferability or superiority of one philosophical approach over another—phenomenology versus pragmatism (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015); analytic versus critical pedagogy (Les, 2021; Kincheloe et al., 2017)—because we have lost students before they would even consider such disputes relevant.

This gives even greater weight to the importance of including philosophy of education courses in graduate programs, because students who opt to conduct research projects that aren't empirically oriented should have ample opportunities to gain experience and expertise in writing philosophically oriented research—especially those who do not already have academic backgrounds in philosophy. However, encouraging students with little or no background in philosophy or in the humanities more broadly to undertake extensive philosophy-oriented projects before they are ready will not help solve the problem of misdirection by methods courses. A formulaic and strictly structured approach may be preferrable to those students who struggle with abstract concepts, and who might produce subpar philosophically oriented work; empirical research can provide structure and guidance to some students without humanities backgrounds.

"Impact"

A key reason that empirical research is held up as the gold standard over philosophical methods is that its more "scientific" claims about evidence are more likely to have an impact on policy decisions in the "real world" and therefore make a more direct and significant impact on educational practice (Slavin, 2002). Stolz and Ozolins describe this as "the trend in education which assumes that educational research only counts if a kind of knowledge is generated that is directly relevant to educational practice or practices" (2018, p. 582). However, in practice, despite appearances, many educational decisions are based on the influence of political ideology and social values rather than empirical evidence. In other words, the chain is less often evidence à policy impact, and more often ideology/values à policy impact.

As Davies (1999) and Goodman (2024) argue, the notion that empirical research is needed to make a greater impact or get a seat at the policy-making table is not always borne out in the real world, as battles about education are most often fought in the realm of ideas and values rather than "evidence-based research." Gert Biesta contends that one of the problems with the focus on evidence in educational research arises due to "the noncausal and normative nature of educational practice and because of the fact that the means and ends in education are internally related" (2007, p. 20). In other words, a focus on empirical evidence often comes at the expense of considering values or ideology, which, though not scientifically rigorous, are nonetheless central to the way our society thinks about education. Empirical research doesn't ask foundational questions about aims or values or the priority of certain outcomes over others; it leaves too much untouched, especially the important questions. More theoretical or conceptually oriented research that explores fundamental questions about education and the values and beliefs people hold about education can be just as impactful and transformative as a more substantial and rigorous empirical study, and often better reflects the role we hope education will play in our society. Biesta (2020) notes that what counts as effective or educationally desirable depends on highly contingent social and political considerations that are not necessarily illuminated or contested by empirical research. Thus, there is a necessity to broaden conceptions of research beyond the assumptions promoted in research methods textbooks and many research methods courses to address the complex web of values and beliefs that surrounds the idea of education in our society.

In light of these observations, one could argue that the value of educational research lies not in how easily its "results" can be translated into policy recommendations or practical, concrete pedagogical strategies; to construe research in such a way would narrow the possibilities of what it might inquire into and what it might offer, for example illuminating a new and distinct way of thinking about education or educational theory.

Should Philosophers Do Empirical Research?

Now that I have defined the problem, it remains to ask what can be done to address these problematic assumptions and practices regarding educational research. Some have argued that the best solution would be for philosophers of education to do more empirical research. For example, Phillips "goads philosophers of education into paying more detailed attention to empirical educational research" (2005, p. 577). In a special issue of *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Wilson and Santoro make an argument in many ways the opposite of the one I advance here, illustrating how empirical research is itself a mode of philosophical inquiry by exploring the work of philosophers of education who "pursue philosophical questions by conducting original empirical research." They wonder, "What is the distinctively philosophical work that philosophers of education do when they engage in empirical research?" (2015, p. 119).

Phillips was not necessarily arguing that philosophers should (themselves) do empirical research, but that they should pay more attention to it, and be in conversation with it. Wilson and Santoro are careful to note, "We do not … argue that all philosophers of education should engage in empirical research." In contrast, they write, "We argue that the field should reflect these wide concerns and support a plurality of possible methodological approaches, only some of which might be empirical" (pp. 121–122).

I wholly support the notion that philosophers of education should pay attention to empirical research and be in conversation with it. And I wholly support the notion of supporting methodological pluralism. However, someone should stand up for philosophy of education in the context of the dominance of tacit

empiricism. I'm not encouraging silos, but rather that philosophy of education be given a fair chance in the context of methodological debates.

While it is valuable for philosophers to do empirical work, and important to encourage philosophers of education to broaden their methodological horizons, I want to suggest that philosophers must defend non-empirical research at least as vigorously by promoting philosophy itself as a legitimate alternative to qualitative and quantitative research. If not philosophers of education, who else is likely to promote philosophical work in education? Certainly not the empiricists! Philosophers must develop ways to defend the value of *not* doing empirical work—or even arguing that philosophy itself *is* empirical work: our "data set" is books, and our "evidence" is arguments.

Positive Steps?: AERA's "Standards for Reporting on Humanities-Oriented Research"

Perhaps surprisingly, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) may be an ally in the mission of broadening conceptions of educational research. In 2009, AERA developed "Standards for Reporting on Humanities-Oriented Research in AERA Publications," with the stated aim of assisting researchers "who are preparing manuscripts that are humanities-oriented, editors and reviewers who are charged with evaluating such manuscripts for publication, and readers of humanities-oriented publications who are interested in learning from and building on such work" (p. 481). These standards emerged due to tremendous efforts by philosophers of education to establish a committee to draft and publish such standards in response to AERA's (2006) "Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Science Research in AERA Publications" for those aiming to publish in empirically oriented educational research publications.

What is particularly significant about the 2009 document is that it notes that there are specific and rigorous methods used in nonempirical research, and that the latter is not merely a set of opinions or conjectures. What distinguishes many of these approaches is that method is not a separable entity, but rather woven into the analysis and interpretation itself. This difference is "due to the character of much humanities-oriented work, in which varied, open-ended methods are embodied within the portrayals and discussions of the phenomena under study" (AERA, 2009, p. 484). These approaches often question presuppositions that are hidden or taken for granted in much empirically oriented research, for example, by exploring conceptions of the aim of education, the "relationships among reason and emotion, the ethical life, the good life, the just society, the characteristics of the good citizen, and concepts of self, knowledge and its grounds, and the arts and their appreciation … or what role education plays and ought to play in the formation of the citizenry" (AERA, 2009, p. 482). Perhaps, in addition to criteria such as relevance, impact, and usefulness, we can assess the value of research on the basis of the extent to which it contributes to developing new ways of knowing and new ways of thinking about education by problematizing "unrecognized assumptions, implications, and consequences of various kinds of educational practice, policy, and research, as well as to challenge what these approaches take for granted as beyond questioning" (p. 482).

But is AERA really an ally after all? AERA's own website states that "education research embraces the full spectrum of rigorous methods appropriate to the questions being asked and also drives the development of new tools and methods" (n.d.). However, despite their apparent support for nonempirical inquiry, the criteria used to evaluate publications and conference proposal submissions often implicitly assume adherence to empirical methods. For example, the "manuscript criteria" for AERA's *American Educational Research Journal* include categories such as "adequate description of methods (including data collection, description of samples, and analysis)" (n.d.). *Educational Researcher*, another AERA journal, only mentions in its submission guidelines (n.d.) the "Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Science Research," not the humanities standards. This is not limited to the US: the *British Educational Research Journal* states that "all required sections should be contained in your manuscript, including abstract, introduction, methods, results, and conclusions" (n.d.). Conference submissions for AERA are evaluated on the basis of methods, data sources, and results. While it may be possible to work within these criteria when submitting philosophical work, AERA reviewers will be using them to evaluate submissions, and philosophically oriented submissions without "data" are likely to be penalized. Two steps forward, one step back.

Rethinking Research: Research Starts *After* Data Collection

If the field of education is not moving to embrace nonempirical philosophical research as quickly as we might hope, perhaps rethinking terminology might help. Peter Roberts questions the meaning and usage of the word "research" and suggests that theory and research are not so far apart. He advocates we shift our thinking from "theory *and* research" to "theory *as* research" (2018, p. 24). Whereas it is commonly held that research means data collection, that if one wants to do research they must collect data, I want to suggest an alternative way of thinking about the relationship between research and data: perhaps research actually starts *after* data collection. In other words, one collects data and then begins to "research." That may help pull the word "research" out of the domain of exclusively empirically oriented projects. In order for philosophy of education to find its place in the broader field of education research, the idea of research must expand to include reading, writing, and thinking. As Peim has it, "thinking is the vital dimension of method—and method itself" (2018, p. 1). Research in this sense is possible without "empirical" data. These are some ways in which, as Judith Suissa suggests, the terms "research" and "method" can be deployed by philosophers towards strategic ends, so that we "broaden the definition of 'research' in order to include the kind of work done by philosophers" (2006, p. 2).

Several new educational research books have emerged in recent years as a response to the dominance of methodolatry and "tacit empiricism" with the aim of promoting a diversity of approaches to educational research. For example, Nick Peim's (2018) *Thinking in Educational Research* critiques the fact that "the element of thinking, the most significant dimension of research, is reduced to a series of choices among fabricated options," and argues instead that "thinking is the vital dimension of method—method itself" (p. 1). In *Theory and Philosophy in Education Research,* Quay et al. (2018) differentiate between method and cooking, arguing that educational research can't be effective when it follows a predetermined step-by-step process but must instead allow for contingency and variability. They demonstrate that methodology as we currently think of it is really like following a recipe (no room for deviation). Instead, method should be much less restricted, able to respond to the real world in all its complexity.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Philosophy of education has much to offer methodology debates. However, its benefit extends beyond helping to improve the quality of empirical research, the way its value is typically framed in dominant discourses about educational research. It's a question of what we value, and why, and with what effect. It is important that philosophers of education develop persuasive arguments to defend what we have to offer educational research so as to present an alternative to the dominant presupposition about the superiority of a relatively unexamined notion of "the empirical" in the field. I suggest philosophers of education must advocate for non-empirical research just as vigorously as many now defend empirical research. In order to promote philosophical approaches to education it is important to promote philosophy itself as a legitimate alternative to qualitative and quantitative research methods. I will leave it as an open question whether there are any malicious intentions on the part of textbook authors and methods courses instructors, or there are nefarious and invisible forces of indoctrination, or it is simply a sin of omission arising due to ignorance and problematic epistemological assumptions. Perhaps non-empirical research doesn't even register as something to consider, as the result of a combination of larger systemic forces at work shaping the field of play. My focus is on consequences rather than questions about intentionality.

The solution is not to idealize philosophy or suggest it is inherently superior to other ways of knowing. After all, philosophy can be trivial, arcane, convoluted, irrelevant—all of the common cliches hold some truth. But my suggestion is that philosophy should be presented as a legitimate way of knowing and a legitimate way of conducting educational research that can work alongside more traditional empirical approaches to produce better results. No matter what, it's essential to ensure that students aren't led to believe that research means exclusively data collection, that research means empirical research, that the only kind of legitimate knowledge in education arises through qualitative or quantitative methods.

What can be done about this? Perhaps we as philosophers of education need to do more to make sure our concerns and voices are part of those conversations, whether in terms of research standards, evaluation criteria for journals and conference submissions, research methods courses, or otherwise. I have raised many questions, paradoxes, hopes, and dilemmas. In closing, I suggest several approaches. First, one can ask how graduate programs determine how students should be prepared to conduct research, and what criteria are used to ensure they are introduced to as wide and diverse a range of approaches as possible. Second, introducing distinct non-empirical research methods courses, perhaps titled "conceptual-based research methods," "humanities-based methods," "argumentative method," "conceptual analysis," and so on. Third, where it isn't possible to introduce such courses, it is still essential to incorporate philosophical questions about educational research into research methods courses alongside empirical methods. This can be done in a co-teaching format or as separate stand-alone courses titled "ways of knowing" or "educational inquiry" that investigate research and knowing more broadly. Methods courses ought to begin by acknowledging that qualitative and quantitative methods are not the only way to conduct educational research, but two choices among many. One must ensure that "methodological diversity" isn't limited to empirical research, but questions tacit empiricism as well. Finally, a call to philosophy of education organizations to highlight this issue might provide opportunities to discuss strategies to address the impact of tacit empiricism and broaden conceptions of educational research. Doing so will not only help promote philosophy of education but also broaden what educational research might teach us about education.

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