

## Methodological Reflection and New Creative Moments in Educational Philosophy

Gregory N. Bourassa  
*University of Utah*

David Meens offers an insightful and provocative discussion about metaphilosophy, method, and methodological reflection. After advancing the argument that philosophy has always been interdisciplinary, Meens provides a concise and helpful overview that highlights both the construction of disciplinary demarcations in academic philosophy and their obstinate and enduring legacies. In his appeal for philosophy of education to move beyond the “Great Partition” that has divided empirical and conceptual pursuits, Meens summons the language of John Dewey and his call for a recovery of philosophy. For Meens, as was the case with Dewey, such a recovery is not so much a dwelling in or yearning for the past. Rather, it is what Dewey called an “imaginative recovery” — an indispensable instrument for proceeding *forward*.<sup>1</sup> As such, an “imaginative recovery” is more about a critical appropriation of particular operations, orientations, modes of thinking, ways of knowing, and tools of construction as opposed to an attempt to transcend a temporal distance. It is here where I share Meens’s enthusiasm for an “imaginative recovery,” one that can foster new interdisciplinaries and as-yet-unexplored hybridizations and possibilities that await educational philosophy.

What I wish to focus on in this response are the two challenges that Meens issues to educational philosophers. One is that “researchers specify their methods and (within reasonable bounds) disclose the (contingent and particular) process of inquiry.” The other challenge is that educational philosophers engage in methodological reflection, and along with this, think about what philosophy can and ought to be. While I thoroughly support the latter aim of methodological reflection, I have concerns about the former challenge to disclose and specify methods. My concerns are not necessarily those that Meens addresses — such as, the reduction of philosophy to mere mechanical method — but are, instead, more closely related to what Michel Foucault referred to as the “hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects.”<sup>2</sup> For instance, if there is any truth to the idea that Claudia Ruitenberg addresses, that “research methods in philosophy of education cannot be divorced from content,” then we should question to what degree the perception of research methods is tied to the perception of content, especially when the content suffers from power-effects at a particular juncture that renders it inferior.<sup>3</sup>

Following this path, we could add that pursuits and expressions of knowledge are never neutral. For many, such expressions can be dangerous, liberatory, and even subversive acts, part of what Foucault called the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” that constitute a threat to systems and institutions.<sup>4</sup> Subjugated knowledges, for Foucault, are those “that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition

or scientificity.”<sup>5</sup> Or, in other words, subjugated knowledges may also be those that stem from particular bodies and bodied experiences that have been and continue to be disqualified. In addition, there are also those curious and strange cases of subjugated knowledges where content is not a predetermined aim that is pursued with intentionality, nor is it an end aim whatsoever. In such instances, method does not yield representational content and thus violates certain codes of academic production by “rendering it inoperative.”<sup>6</sup> In the eyes of a growing number of institutions, the knowledge collected in such strange approaches is held in low esteem, for it is a knowledge that is neither “productive” nor easily exchanged and therefore fails to meet the success conditions of the neoliberal academy.

In part, then, one concern I have about Meens’s challenge to specify methods is that it is temporally tethered to other discursive agendas of a neoliberal knowledge economy that bring with them nefarious material power-effects. Thus, specifying methods can be a vulnerable act for some, one that potentially further accentuates hierarchies of knowledge and the devaluation of some approaches and the exaltation of others. At the same time, I think Meens’s challenge could be met with voluntary moments of creative experiment in which, as Ruitenberg puts it, educational philosophers “talk about their research methods without submitting to the paradigms and expectations of the social sciences,”<sup>7</sup> and, I would add, without submitting to or implicating oneself in “the neoliberal agenda which is also tied to global colonialism.”<sup>8</sup>

What I am suggesting, then, in conveying some hesitancy about specifying methods, is that educational philosophers should consider questions of enclosure and exclusion in such a process. In this regard, I believe the work of Enrique Dussel is helpful. Dussel shares many of the same concerns as Foucault, that is, concerns about power-effects. In Dussel’s view, all fields — or what we might think of as spheres of interaction — and their corresponding systems inevitably produce exclusions. In some instances, as I am suggesting is the case with method, Dussel claims that an “empirical judgement of fact” can be made that describes an exclusion.<sup>9</sup> Thus, as I suggested above, we can say that demands to specify methods can and do, in some instances, operate as an apparatus of exclusion for particular bodies and bodies of thought that have been disqualified.

At the same time — and this is what I find intriguing in Dussel’s line of thought — it is impossible to discover all of those who are affected, or potentially affected in the future by such a demand. For Dussel, this means that while there are always exclusions, the task is to develop a habitual stance or orientation that demands attention to a field from the very location of its exclusions. I believe that such an orientation that challenges a variety of enclosures can and should be part of Meens’s imaginative recovery of philosophy. In fact, this is why I so much appreciate Meens’s other challenge and emphasis on the vital role of methodological reflection, the strength of which, as Meens shows, can foster new interdisciplinaries and, I believe, facilitate and encourage the types of methodological concerns that I address here about exclusions and power-effects.

We are left, then, with a formidable invitation to strive toward new creative moments in the imaginative recovery of educational philosophy in which there is collective engagement with the question of what it can and ought to be, and an invitation to creatively experiment with elaborating on methods without submitting to or implicating oneself in a neoliberal agenda. Methodological reflection will be key in both of these endeavors.

While many challenges and tasks have been cast, I want to conclude by leaving one additional fragment. In his lectures at the College of France in 1976, Foucault offers some prefatory remarks about the connections between research, public statements, and teaching. Foucault makes clear that he saw the lectures as an opportunity to make public statements about his research developments. But in an interesting moment where Foucault offers a pedagogical presentation of his thinking, he shares a concern about trying to “rediscover the possibility of the exchange and contact that are part of the normal practice of research and teaching.”<sup>10</sup> His insights reveal his ambiguities about sharing his research in disconnected ways, that is, without a sense of relation to and engagement with others.

As I reflect on the implications of this event that Foucault describes, I cannot help but think that educational philosophers, as Meens rightly points out, have some distinctive strengths when it comes to thinking about what it means to be in conversation about our research. In fact, I wonder if there is a tendency to overlook, or perhaps take for granted, the many ways in which educational philosophers *already* engage in edifying and collective forms of methodological reflection. Therefore, what I appreciate in Meens’s emphasis on imaginative recovery is that it seems fully committed to recognizing the valuable strengths and habits, modes of thinking, listening and speaking that are, to a certain extent, unique to educational philosophers and thus can inform new creative moments and experiments in educational philosophy.

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1. John Dewey, “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude* (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), 14.

2. Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 10.

3. Claudia Ruitenberg, “Introduction: The Question of Method in Philosophy of Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 3 (2009): 317.

4. Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” 7.

5. Ibid.

6. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 86.

7. Ruitenberg, “Introduction,” 316.

8. Riyad Shahjahan, “Decolonizing the Evidence-Based Education and Policy Movement: Revealing the Colonial Vestiges in Educational Policy, Research, and Neoliberal Reform,” *Journal of Educational Policy* 26, no. 2 (2011): 198.

9. Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 279.

10. Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” 3.