**Immunitas and Teacher Knowledge**

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“The immunitary paradigm does not present itself in terms of action, but rather in terms of *reaction* – rather than a force, it is a repercussion, a counterforce, which hinders another force from coming into being” (Esposito, 2011, p. 7).

“We’ll ensure discredited ideas unsupported by firm evidence are not promoted to new teachers” (Department for Education (DfE), 2016, p. 12)

For over two years now, the Covid-19 pandemic has posed a mortal threat to our biological bodies. But as Roberto Esposito (2011) insightfully and presciently notes, epidemiological notions of contamination and contagion have spread beyond the confines of medicine and biology and into the social, technological and political realms. In this reading, the regulatory and symbolic orders of law and language are also caught up in the medical paradigm and can be productively (re)thought in terms of immunization. Critically for our paper, moves towards formalizing and standardizing knowledge in teacher education, alongside the dominant discourse of ‘evidence based’ policy and practice and a prevailing emphasis on ‘what works’, can be read as attempts to immunize the profession against unhealthy or undesirable influences that might threaten and undermine educational wellbeing.

Yet immunization does not only have a positive, protective function; it also involves a logic of negation. Just as biological immunization involves allowing a little of what threatens the body to transgress its protective boundaries, so too in immunizing the body politic, law and language perpetrate violence in the name of protection.

In this paper, we will discuss these ideas in relation to two immunization projects undertaken by England’s government in order to protect the minds and bodies of teachers and students in schools. Specifically, a legal requirement to promote so-called Fundamental British Values (FBVs), and a national accountability and performativity framework which promotes reliance on synthetic phonics in teaching literacy. Our argument is that the insistence on and repetition of these requirements can be read as instances of hermeneutic epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), insofar as other modes of thought and practice are thereby rendered invisible, unthinkable and illegitimate. To counter this ideologically-driven epistemic authoritarianism we advocate a notion of agonistic pragmatism (Rorty, 2021; Wenman, 2013) that values pluralism, contestation and openness.

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