


TRUTHS IN RUINS: ETHICAL-EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF INFORMATIONAL DISORDER <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.008-005>**Marco Machado¹****ABSTRACT**

Informational disorder, characterized by the proliferation of fake news, hate speech, and algorithmic manipulation, constitutes a profound threat to the democratic construction of knowledge and the critical formation of subjects. This chapter analyzes the impacts of this phenomenon on education, articulating philosophical and pedagogical reflections on truth, ethics, and autonomy. Through bibliographic research, it discusses the challenges faced by educators and students in a scenario where the boundaries between fact and opinion become blurred. It concludes that critical education, grounded in the ethics of dialogue and the valorization of autonomous thinking, is an essential path to resist the erosion of truth and foster emancipatory pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Disinformation; Critical Education; Ethics; Autonomy; Post-truth.

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INTRODUCTION

Technological transformations in contemporary society impose a series of social and political changes that challenge the foundations of modern thought. Among all phenomena, perhaps the most concerning is the growing devaluation of truth in public discourse. The so-called "post-truth era" not only threatens the domains of communication and politics but also calls into question the formative role of education and the very possibility of constructing a rational and democratic public sphere.

This chapter starts from the diagnosis that we are experiencing a collapse of public trust in truth as a criterion for validating discourse, generating profound impacts on the ethical, political, and educational life of contemporary societies. Disinformation, as a structuring phenomenon of this process, will be analyzed here not as an occasional deviation but as a symptom of a broader epistemological and existential crisis in society.

The aim is to identify, through reflections from authors such as Hannah Arendt, Gert Biesta, Michel Foucault, and Lee McIntyre, the consequences of informational disorder on the formation of subjects, teaching practice, and educational institutions. Subsequently, the chapter defends the proposition that critical education can construct a privileged space for resistance to the erosion of truth and institutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INFORMATIONAL DISORDER AS A CRISIS OF TRUTH

The expression "informational disorder," used by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), describes the collapse of boundaries between legitimate information, disinformation, and deliberate content manipulation. This collapse reflects a deeper crisis: that of the very notion of truth as a public value. It is not merely the proliferation of fake news, but the substitution of reason by emotions and identities as criteria for validating discourse.

Arendt (1994), in her classic essay "Truth and Politics," anticipated this logic by demonstrating that authoritarian regimes do not merely lie but construct a parallel reality where facts become secondary to ideological coherence. Although Arendt did not witness the rise of the internet and social media, the symbolic operation she identified is today amplified by algorithms that personalize informational experiences, creating epistemic bubbles (Nguyen, 2019) highly resistant to alterity and dialogue.

McIntyre (2018) argues that "post-truth" represents an epistemic regression in which generalized skepticism transforms into cynicism, undermining the foundations of shared knowledge. Trust in knowledge-producing institutions — such as science, journalism, and education — is corroded by a conspiratorial logic that relativizes everything except its own beliefs. These findings are corroborated by



Machado (2024), who reinforces the precariousness of trust in institutions as a factor in the emergence and proliferation of denialism.

This crisis of truth is not merely epistemological: it has ethical and political implications. Without a minimum of collectively recognized facts, without tolerance for dialogue, and without critical sense, democratic deliberation becomes impossible, and the public sphere fragments into micro-spheres of certainties immune to contestation (Machado, 2025).

DISINFORMATION AND EDUCATION: IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

Disinformation not only distorts facts but interferes with the formation of subjectivity. Education, as a process of constructing autonomous judgment, is deeply affected by this new scenario. The impacts of disinformation on educational contexts are multiple and interdependent, requiring complex analyses and systematic responses. Below, we examine four main impacts and challenges of disinformation in education.

Weakening of the Epistemic Authority of Educators

The authority of the teacher, traditionally sustained by mastery of content, critical mediation of knowledge, and ethical commitment to truth, is today profoundly strained. In a scenario dominated by the massive and rapid circulation of information — much of it false, decontextualized, or deliberately manipulated — teachers' knowledge competes with a myriad of "informative" sources operating outside scientific and pedagogical criteria. Unverified websites, conspiratorial channels, social networks, and digital influencers gain credibility not for their rigor or reliability, but through the aesthetics of proximity, emotional language, and identity appeal.

This new informational ecology alters students' perception of the value of school knowledge. Instead of being challenged to argue, problematize, and interpret critically, many are attracted to simplified, polarized narratives filled with instant certainties. The result is growing distrust toward teachers' discourse, often accused of being "ideological" when confronting worldviews anchored in digital bubbles. The pedagogical bond, which depends on building mutual trust and recognizing the educator's legitimacy as a mediator of knowledge, becomes fragile and vulnerable to external attacks.

Moreover, teachers are frequently placed in the uncomfortable position of having to "compete" for truth in the classroom — not as a critical exercise but as a defensive reaction to the spread of disinformation. This not only emotionally burdens educators but compromises the educational space as an environment for civic formation and collective meaning-making. In this context, schools cease to be seen as places of cultural mediation and become, for some, a threat to the stability of personal beliefs nurtured by algorithms and hate speech.



Reduction of Critical Judgment Capacity

Critical thinking, an essential foundation of contemporary critical pedagogies such as those of Gert Biesta and Henry Giroux, is severely impacted by continuous, unregulated exposure to disinformative discourses that flood the digital everyday. The flood of content, often disconnected, contradictory, or deliberately manipulated, generates cognitive overload that directly affects individuals' reflective capacity. The so-called "informational saturation"—marked not just by excess data but by the lack of clear criteria to rank, analyze, and understand them — provokes a kind of numbing of critical consciousness. Rather than fostering autonomy of thought, this informational avalanche tends to produce apathy, conformity, and vulnerability to ready-made discourses.

Attention fatigue, fueled by the logic of speed and hyperexposure, hinders active listening, rational argumentation, and the time necessary for elaborating complex ideas. As a result, information consumption becomes superficial, fragmented, and guided by affective impulses — compromising students' capacity to compare arguments, verify sources, and support positions based on ethical and epistemological criteria. Critical thinking, instead of developing as a daily practice of freedom, risks being replaced by automatic, polarized reactions anchored in fabricated truths.

This scenario represents a serious challenge for critical pedagogy, faced with the task of forming subjects capable not only of identifying fallacies or debunking fake news but of reconstructing an active, conscious relationship with language, meaning-making processes, and the world. For education to remain a space of liberation—and not a reproduction of alienation—it is necessary to profoundly rethink pedagogical practices, revaluing the time for thought, dialogue as method, and curiosity as the engine of critical learning.

Affectivity as a Criterion of Truth

Disinformation often operates through affective triggers that escape rational vigilance and function at the most instinctive level of human emotions. Moving images, catchy phrases with strong emotional appeal, and simplified narratives offering easy explanations for complex phenomena are recurrent resources in the production of disinformative content. These elements not only capture attention but shape perceptions, generate instant empathy, and reinforce pre-existing beliefs, creating a closed circuit of meaning resistant to logical argumentation. In this environment, truth ceases to be a dialogical construction and comes to be perceived as an obstacle to the subject's affective identity, especially when it confronts their worldview.

This dynamic is particularly dangerous because it shifts the criterion of veracity to the field of emotional resonance: what "touches," "moves," or "outrages" tends to be automatically validated as true. The result is the proliferation of denialism — not only as the refusal of empirical facts but as an emotional



defense against the cognitive discomfort of revising opinions and admitting contradictions. The strength of disinformation, therefore, lies not only in a well-told lie but in its capacity to root itself in affections, offer belonging, and confirm identities in times of uncertainty.

For educators, this scenario imposes a complex challenge: mediating conflicts between reason and belief, fact and opinion, without resorting to cognitive authoritarianism, which would only reinforce existing resistances. It involves cultivating a pedagogy of care and dialogue, capable of welcoming affections without yielding to anti-intellectualism; of valuing listening without relativizing the importance of scientific knowledge; of building bridges between the emotional and the rational, recognizing that critical thinking does not dispense with emotions — but must traverse them to avoid being captured by them. Educating, in this context, also means teaching how to feel ethically, critically, and collectively.

Crisis of Institutional Trust

The discourse of distrust, skillfully fueled by disinformation strategies, affects not only individual teachers but corrodes the legitimacy of the school as a public institution committed to critical and civic formation. The rhetoric of "ideological indoctrination," often used vaguely and accusatorily, transforms the educational space into a field of symbolic and political-cultural dispute, where pedagogical work is monitored, interpreted with suspicion, and often disqualified by sectors of society that see the school not as a place of dialogue and collective knowledge construction, but as an ideological enemy.

This atmosphere of constant surveillance, amplified by social networks, populist discourses, and anti-scientific movements, undermines democratic pedagogical projects by weakening the principles of pedagogical autonomy and freedom of thought. Academic freedom, the constitutional principle that ensures the teacher's possibility to teach based on the accumulated knowledge of their field and their critical conscience, becomes systematically questioned, if not directly attacked. Teachers are compelled to self-censorship, fearing administrative, legal, or even personal retaliation in virtual or physical environments.

Fear becomes the dominant affect in the school's daily life, replacing the trust that should sustain the bond between school, community, and educational project. Instead of promoting free thought, plural debate, and coexistence with difference, the school is pressured to adopt a "neutral" stance — which, in practice, means abdicating the commitment to human rights, social justice, and the complexity of knowledge. In this context, education ceases to be a space of social transformation and becomes conditioned by interests aimed at controlling discourses and reproducing authoritarian values.

Rescuing the school's legitimacy and educators' ethical authority thus requires more than public policies: it demands a cultural confrontation against the narratives that criminalize critical thinking. It is necessary to reconstruct, in the public space, the understanding that teaching is a political act — not in the



partisan sense, but in the profound sense of intervening in the world, forming subjects capable of understanding and transforming their reality. Defending the school, in this scenario, is defending democracy itself.

ETHICS, POLITICS, AND THE FORMATION OF AUTONOMY

"An education that forms only efficient workers and not reflective citizens puts democracy itself at risk." (Nussbaum, 2015)

The formation of intellectual autonomy is not a spontaneous occurrence but an ethical and political process that requires specific institutional, methodological, and relational conditions. The crisis of truth highlights the urgency of revaluing education as a space for cultivating discursive responsibility and democratic coexistence.

As proposed by Biesta (2011) and Giroux (2019), education can be conceived as a practice of freedom, where dialogue and ethical responsibility constitute fundamental principles. The educator, in this model, is not a transmitter of absolute truths but a mediator of meanings who recognizes the other as a legitimate interlocutor. In this process, the commitment to truth is not dogmatic but ethical: it is the recognition that discourses have consequences and that knowledge implies responsibility.

Foucault (2008), reflecting on the "care of the self," offers another powerful pathway: critical formation involves practices of subjectivation that allow the individual to become the author of their own existence, resisting forms of subjection. This requires pedagogical practices in schools that encourage problematization, doubt, displacement, and active listening.

It is at the intersection of ethics and politics that education can reconstruct the bonds between truth, freedom, and solidarity. The task is not to "return" to truth as imposition but to reconstitute it as a common horizon, shared by subjects who mutually recognize each other as seekers of meaning.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on bibliographic research of a qualitative and interpretive nature, whose methodological strategy is anchored in the critical analysis and articulation of relevant theoretical productions in the fields of Philosophy, Education, Epistemology, and Communication. According to Gil (2008), bibliographic research seeks to examine, through published works, the accumulated production on a given topic, aiming to understand, problematize, or reinterpret concepts and phenomena.

The selected authors — including Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Gert Biesta, and Lee McIntyre — were chosen for their relevance in the debate on truth, power, education, and discourse. The analysis of these primary sources is complemented by recent scientific articles addressing the impact of



disinformation on formative processes. The approach adopted is critical, seeking not only to describe phenomena but to propose pathways for their overcoming within the educational context.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Education is a process of life and not a preparation for future life." (Dewey, 1979)

Informational disorder represents more than a technical challenge of fact-checking or data correction: it is, above all, a symptom of a broader epistemic and political crisis, in which the foundations of democratic coexistence, shared knowledge, and ethical commitment to truth are being eroded by invisible yet profoundly effective dynamics of power. The proliferation of false narratives, the extreme personalization of informational content, and the logic of emotional engagement over argumentative rationality configure a scenario in which the very notion of truth disintegrates — not due to the absence of facts, but because of the deliberate relativization of what can be recognized as legitimate in the public space.

In this context, education assumes a role that transcends the mere transmission of content or training of cognitive skills. It presents itself as the last bastion of resistance against the fabrication of docile, uncritical subjectivities vulnerable to manipulation. At the same time, it faces a paradox: it is called upon to promote autonomy in an environment where autonomy itself is threatened by forces operating in subterranean, algorithmic, and emotional ways. It is not just about teaching how to identify fake news or how to check sources — though this is necessary — but about forming subjects capable of desiring the truth, even when it contradicts their beliefs or affections.

To educate for autonomy, therefore, is to educate for discomfort, for constant questioning, for openness to the other, and for methodical doubt. It implies rehabilitating listening as an ethical practice, restoring the value of rational argumentation in times of digital hysteria, and sustaining the belief in language as a bridge rather than a wall. And this is not achieved solely through active methodologies or innovative technological resources, but through an ethical-political commitment that restores education's transformative dimension.

Ultimately, this chapter proposes that resisting informational disorder is not an exclusive task for fact-checking platforms or public policies on digital regulation — although both are important. It is, above all, a pedagogical mission, in the broadest and deepest sense of the term: to educate for truth as an ethical and shared practice, as collective construction, and as a common horizon. In dark times, insisting on the possibility of truth is also insisting on the possibility of the common, of democracy, and of hope.



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