

Call for Abstracts

Pre-Conference Seminar at ISCHE 47 in Athens, Greece, July 14, 2026

History of Education Perspectives on Knowledge, Ignorance, and Truth

For the upcoming ISCHE 47 Conference in Athens, Greece (15–18 July 2026), we would like to propose a pre-conference seminar that invites papers engaging with questions of knowledge, truth, and their contestation in the history of education. The seminar seeks to examine how knowledge became accepted, problematized, politicized, or emotionalized in educational contexts. We invite contributions that historicize contemporary anxieties about truth from history of education perspectives by examining how schools, universities, and informal educational spaces have shaped and have been shaped by evolving understandings of different knowledges such as scientific and popular, professional and implicit everyday-knowledge or expertise, and public knowledge.

The contemporary discourse on ‘post-truth’ politics has positioned our current moment as characterized by the erosion of shared epistemic foundations and the proliferation of competing truth claims from the question of the effectiveness of vaccines to the danger of Tylenol (Harsin, 2015; McIntyre, 2018). However, our predicament may be less a ‘Crisis of Truth’ than a crisis of institutional authority and social knowledge. ‘Social knowledge’—knowing who knows, which institutions merit trust—has historically been cultivated through educational practices, in schools, universities and beyond. Yet the normalization of scientific knowledge within institutions of power and profit represents both success and crisis: as it became embedded in statecraft and commerce, its claim to disinterested truth became increasingly tenuous (Shapin, 2019). The petroleum industry’s resistance to climate science or tobacco companies’ doubt-mongering about cancer research provide stark examples for how profit motives corrupt the social processes essential to scientific objectivity. When economic or ideological commitments preclude good-faith engagement with evidence, the social processes that generate reliable knowledge are disabled (Oreskes, 2015). In the history of knowledge, concepts such as knowledge and truth were fundamentally questioned, with their dependence on an epistemic community being highlighted (Nilsson Hammar 2018, 111). What can historical examination reveal about the recursive production of ignorance alongside knowledge, the role of education in both processes, and the conditions under which knowledge gains or loses legitimacy?

To address these questions, we invite contributions that attend to the actors involved in processes of knowledge production (such as experts, public communities, institutions, intellectuals, public figures, but also teachers and students in everyday practices), the arenas where these struggles unfold (e.g., classrooms, media, policy debates, online platforms), and the formats and forms through which knowledge circulates and gains legitimacy (e.g., textbooks, curricula, scientific publications, newspapers, TV shows).

Possible configurations through which the seminar topic could be addressed include, but are not limited to:

1. Knowledge and validity: How do knowledge claims achieve validity and become normative in educational contexts? How have educational institutions historically negotiated competing epistemologies? This strand explores the mechanisms through which certain knowledge forms gain epistemic authority by investigating the relationships between different validity regimes.

2. Ignorance and openness: What is the relationship between strategic ignorance, epistemic humility, and the politics of not-knowing? This perspective engages with possible tensions between expert authority and democratic openness to contested knowledge by considering how particular forms of ignorance are produced and upheld.

3. Post-truth and disbelief: What constitutes the role of empirical validity in emotionally charged knowledge claims? What role has science education played in cultivating ‘social knowledge’ – the capacity to recognize credible expertise and trustworthy institutions? This strand examines cases of emotional resonance superseding established knowledge previously deemed valid.

We are particularly interested in papers that draw on emerging scholarship on ignorance, non-knowledge, and contested epistemic boundaries—including agnotology (Proctor & Schiebinger 2008), histories of ignorance (Burke 2023), cultures of non-knowledge or *Nichtwissen*, undone science, epistemologies of ignorance (Sullivan & Tuana 2007), and concepts such as lost knowledge, selective ignorance, or implicit knowledge. How do these frameworks illuminate the processes by which knowledge in or about education becomes accepted, contested, or forgotten?

We especially would like to encourage case-based presentations that demonstrate the practices through which particular knowledge(s) became dominant, delegitimized, politicized, or emotionalized. Participants are invited to highlight specific sources (documents, textbooks, curricula, visual materials, objects, etc.) and to demonstrate how these materials reveal processes of knowledge alteration, emotional framing, political contestation, or normative consolidation.

Presentation Formats

Individual Research Papers: 20-minute presentations of completed research or work-in-progress (followed by a 10-minute discussion)

Roundtables: 60-minute collaborative discussions featuring short statements from multiple scholars on a history of the present regarding knowledge, ignorance, and truth, focusing on what a history of education perspective can offer

Interactive Sessions: 90-minute sessions exploring methodological approaches to research about knowledge, ignorance and truth, including questions of expertise, scientific authority, and (democratic) education

Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of 250–300 words by 15 May 2026 to Fanny Isensee (fanny-lynne.isensee@hu-berlin.de). All career stages are welcome.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 1 June 2026.

Convenors:

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References

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