Abstract

Facing the challenges to elementary and secondary education in the 21st century requires teachers as well as students, support staff, parents, administrators, academics, and the broader community to confront deeply held assumptions. To address these challenges, schools need to be places where meaningful and sustaining conversations unfold.

How we speak to one another becomes my entry point into this societal endeavour we call 'education’. In this investigation I set out to form a language-based epistemic lens through which future research can study how communicative practices aid or impede educational processes.

This investigation draws on philosophy of language and phenomenology. In particular, I look at the ideas of J.L. Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The main body of this work is divided into three parts. Part one problematizes the concept of language in order to flesh out its life, to see language qua language in the making. Part two is an extended discussion of Austin’s How To Do Things With Words, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations and Merleau-Ponty’s The Visible and the Invisible that scaffolds an understanding of language as an animating force behind what we call ‘life’ and ‘reality’. Part three is a set of expressions of the ideas about the elementality of language developed in this dissertation: first as an exploration of subjective registers of language; second as a fictional dialogue representing my own cognitive shifts in this doctoral dissertation; and third as a reflection on the implications of language sensitivity on education. Together these parts demonstrate that living language is not so much a concept as an action, a human activity in the confirmation of what is real, what is meaningful, what is life itself. The findings of this dissertation do not bring closure to the subject of language but rather bring into the open the subject itself, that it is in the possibilities that the ground of our beliefs is formed.

Keywords: philosophy of language; phenomenology; dialogue; twenty first century; Austin; Wittgenstein; Merleau-Ponty