

The architecture of not-seeing: Theorizing epistemic blindness as a structural feature of credentialist education

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Received: 04 June 2026 | **Revised:** 26 October 2026 | **Accepted:** 27 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of equity and inclusion reform, educational systems continue to reproduce epistemological hierarchies that marginalize non-dominant knowledges and erode learner agency in patterned, predictable ways. This paper argues that existing theoretical frameworks — hidden curriculum, epistemic injustice, and epistemologies of ignorance — illuminate important dimensions of this problem but do not fully account for its most consequential feature: the simultaneous production of epistemic invisibility for marginalized learners and the structural inability to perceive that invisibility in dominant-group learners. This paper introduces the concept of the architecture of not-seeing to name and theorize this condition. The architecture of not-seeing refers to the interlocking curricular, pedagogical, and assessment infrastructures through which credentialist education systems simultaneously erase the epistemic agency of marginalized learners and foreclose the perceptual capacity of dominant-group learners, producing both the unseen and the non-seer through the same mechanisms, while naturalizing both effects as the ordinary, neutral functioning of education. The paper traces three constitutive mechanisms — abstraction from lived context, decontextualized standards of legitimacy, and institutional recognition as proxy for knowing — and shows how these mechanisms produce differential epistemic effects while remaining invisible as mechanisms. It then explains why reform efforts so frequently reproduce the architecture's logic: because the architecture produces the very actors tasked with reforming it. The paper concludes by considering what the concept makes possible for curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and democratic education, positioning epistemic visibility as a foundational educational aim rather than a supplementary one.

KEYWORDS: Architecture of not-seeing; Epistemic injustice; Epistemologies of ignorance; Credentialism; Epistemic visibility

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29329/pedper.2026.195> | Vol. 5, No. 2 (2026) | pp. 437-458

1. Introduction: The Problem that Has No Name

On two occasions in Northwest British Columbia, I had the opportunity to work relationally and collaboratively, and partially outside the Western institutional frameworks within which contemporary educational systems routinely operate, with Indigenous Nations to co-design multi-year education strategies rooted in each Nation's own priorities, relationships, and vision for its members. The first Nation sought a five-year education strategy spanning human services, cultural

continuity, and industry preparation. The second sought to co-construct an applied coastal ecology program for its Guardians, community members entrusted with the stewardship of the Nation's environment, food systems, and intergenerational relationships to the land. In both cases, what the Nations were building was, by any meaningful definition, education: purposeful, community-accountable, place-grounded, and oriented toward the flourishing of people and land across time.

Neither initiative found its way through the institutional architecture intact.

The constraints were not hostile. No one said no. No policy explicitly prohibited what these Nations were proposing. The funding agency for Indigenous education was not indifferent to Indigenous learners. The college was not unwilling. What happened instead was quieter and, on reflection, more instructive: the architecture of provincial funding cycles (e.g., annual applications, single-fiscal-year delivery windows, compressed approval-to-reporting timelines, standardized delivery assumptions) had no category for a five-year education strategy. A program designed to be delivered within the relational and geographical realities of a coastal Indigenous community could not be processed by systems built for standardized institutional delivery. The proposals were not evaluated and rejected. They were, in a more fundamental sense, structurally unreadable.

This is not an anecdote about bureaucratic inefficiency. It is an illustration of something more consequential: the systems were functioning correctly. They were doing exactly what they were designed to do. The problem was not malfunction but design — a design that determined, before any proposal arrived, what forms of educational knowledge could be seen, evaluated, and resourced, and what forms could not.

This pattern is not confined to Indigenous education policy, nor to northern communities, nor to Canada. It is visible wherever educational systems encounter knowledges that are oral rather than text-based, collective rather than individually authored, place-specific rather than universally transferable, or transmitted through relationship and practice rather than credentialed instruction. The pattern is consistent: such knowledges do not fail evaluation. They fail to reach it. The architecture has already rendered them illegible before any judgment is made.

Educational scholarship has named many dimensions of this problem. The hidden curriculum literature has illuminated how schools transmit unstated norms, values, and hierarchies alongside their explicit content (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1968). Epistemic injustice scholarship has traced how marginalized knowers are systematically discredited or denied the interpretive resources to make sense of their own experience (Dotson, 2011; Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). Epistemologies of ignorance have shown how not-knowing is actively produced and maintained, particularly among dominant groups (Mills, 1997, 2007; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008; Tuana, 2006). Each of these frameworks has contributed something essential. None of them, as this paper argues, fully accounts for what the examples above reveal: a condition in which the same educational mechanisms simultaneously produce invisibility for some knowers and the structural inability to perceive that invisibility in others, and sustain both effects under the appearance of ordinary, neutral institutional functioning.

There is, as yet, no established theoretical term for this condition. That absence is itself part of what this paper seeks to address. Stated plainly, the problem is a theoretical one. Existing frameworks explain how educational systems discredit some knowers and how dominant groups come not to know, but none accounts for a single educational infrastructure that produces both effects at once while presenting itself as neutral. The question guiding this paper follows: what do hidden curriculum

theory, epistemic injustice, and epistemologies of ignorance leave unexplained about this condition, and what concept would account for it?

A word about position. This paper argues that credentialist educational systems produce structural blindness, and it is written by someone who holds two degrees from Western-accredited institutions and has spent a career operating within, and benefiting from, the very architecture under critique. Khatibi's (1983) double critique (i.e., the imperative to think rigorously against one's own formation, to hold inherited frameworks under the same critical pressure one applies to others) names this condition honestly. This paper does not claim to stand outside the architecture it theorizes. It claims only to look at it steadily, from inside, and to describe what becomes visible when one does.

The sections that follow attempt precisely that. They do not begin by naming the concept this paper introduces. They begin where the argument requires: with the frameworks that already exist, what each one sees, and crucially, what each one leaves unexplained.

1.1. Approach and Scope

This is a conceptual paper; it reports no empirical research. Its method is theory-building through conceptual analysis, combining two of the approaches Jaakkola (2020) identifies for conceptual articles: theory synthesis, in which existing frameworks are examined and integrated to reveal what none accounts for alone, and the model approach, in which a new construct is specified through its mechanisms and effects. Section 2 examines three adjacent frameworks for what each explains and what each leaves unexplained, Table 1 consolidates their contributions and limits, and Sections 3 and 4 specify the proposed construct, its three mechanisms, and the dual production they achieve. As Ruitenberg (2009) observes, philosophical work in education has methods of its own, even where they are not codified as procedures in the way empirical methods are. The claims made here are accordingly claims of explanatory adequacy, concerning what the concept allows researchers and practitioners to see and to ask, rather than claims of empirical generalization. Section 5.4 names what this approach does not establish.

The two Northwest British Columbia examples serve as illustrations, not as data. They are drawn from my own professional practice in post-secondary education and describe how the institutional architecture received two initiatives I worked on, as I experienced it from within that architecture. They do not describe the Nations' knowledge, deliberations, or internal processes, and no community knowledge or materials are reproduced. Neither Nation is named, and both initiatives are described in terms general enough to limit identification. This paper was not undertaken with or on behalf of either Nation and does not speak for them. The account is of the architecture as I encountered it from inside, which is the vantage point this paper claims throughout.

2. What We Already Have and What It Leaves Unexplained

The problem described in the preceding section is not invisible to educational scholarship. Researchers and theorists have been circling it, from different directions and with different instruments, for decades. The question this section asks is not whether existing frameworks illuminate the problem — they do — but whether any of them, singly or in combination, fully accounts for what those Northwest British Columbia examples revealed: a structural condition that produces epistemic invisibility while simultaneously producing the inability to perceive it, and sustains both effects as the ordinary, unremarkable functioning of educational systems. That is a specific theoretical claim, and it requires a specific theoretical tool.

2.1. Hidden Curriculum

The concept of the hidden curriculum, developed by Jackson (1968) and elaborated by Apple (2004), Giroux and Penna (1979), and Margolis et al (2001), remains one of the most generative contributions in curriculum theory. Its central insight, that schools teach far more than their official curricula announce, and that much of what they teach concerns compliance, hierarchy, and the naturalization of dominant social arrangements, opened a critical line of inquiry that continues to inform educational research and practice.

The hidden curriculum framework is particularly powerful in revealing how socialization operates implicitly: how learners absorb norms about authority, competition, and the relationship between obedience and reward without those lessons ever appearing in a syllabus. Freire's (1970/2000) related concept of the banking model of education extended this analysis by showing how pedagogical relationships themselves encode epistemological assumptions, positioning the teacher as the holder of knowledge and the learner as its passive recipient, a relationship that reflects and reproduces broader social hierarchies.

The funding cycle that could not read a five-year Nation-designed education strategy was not shaped by ignorance of that need. It was a system created in a different context, for a different logic, that was never designed to interface with Indigenous educational planning and whose constraints have since been broadly understood, including by funders themselves, yet persist unchanged. This is not hidden curriculum. It is something quieter and more intractable: a kind of silent, artificial harmony, in which the gap between what the system can process and what communities need is acknowledged on all sides and remedied by no one. The dysfunction is visible. The architecture is not.

And yet the hidden curriculum framework reaches a limit here. Its primary analytical register is socialization and ideological transmission. It asks what schools teach implicitly, and traces how dominant cultural norms are reproduced through institutional routines and social relations. What it does not centrally address is the epistemic dimension of this process: not merely what is taught implicitly, but what is rendered structurally imperceptible, and to whom. The hidden curriculum framework attends to what learners absorb without knowing they are absorbing it. It does not fully theorize what learners are structurally prevented from perceiving nor, crucially, the differential nature of that prevention across differently positioned learners. In the Northwest BC examples, what is at stake is not only socialization into dominant norms. It is a structural condition in which certain knowledges cannot be seen as knowledge at all and in which that invisibility is simultaneously invisible to those the system most privileges.

Reproduction theory comes closer still, and its proximity should be acknowledged. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) argued that pedagogic action imposes a cultural arbitrary whose authority depends on that arbitrariness being misrecognized, and that schooling converts social advantage into what appears as individual merit, so that success feels natural to those whose habitus matches the school's demands and failure feels personal to those whose habitus does not. Much of what this paper calls the dual production is anticipated here. The architecture of not-seeing departs from reproduction theory at the point where knowledge, rather than culture, becomes the object. Bourdieu and Passeron's cultural arbitrary is ranked within a single epistemic order: the dispositions of dominated classes are recognized, and devalued, on the same scale that rewards the dominant class. The knowledges at issue in this paper are not ranked low on that scale. They never enter it. Oral, relational, and place-based knowledges fail not because the architecture values them less but because it cannot read them as knowledge at all, a difference that becomes decisive wherever educational institutions meet knowledge traditions they were not built to recognize.

2.2. Epistemic Injustice

Fricker's (2007) framework of epistemic injustice offered a conceptually precise account of a different dimension of the problem. Where hidden curriculum theory addressed socialization and ideology, epistemic injustice named specific wrongs done to persons in their capacity as knowers. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's credibility is deflated due to identity prejudice; when what someone knows is discounted because of who they are. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretive resources disadvantages someone trying to make sense of their own social experience, because the dominant conceptual vocabulary was built without their participation.

The epistemic injustice framework illuminated something the hidden curriculum literature had not fully named: that marginalized people are not merely socialized differently, but epistemically wronged, that the discounting of their knowledge constitutes a specific form of harm, and that this harm operates through identifiable mechanisms. Dotson's (2011) extension of this framework to include testimonial smothering, the practice of truncating one's own testimony in anticipation of unreceptive audiences, and Medina's (2013) account of epistemic resistance and the epistemology of insurrection deepened and complicated the original framework in important ways.

For the problem at hand, epistemic injustice offers genuine explanatory power. The credentialing mechanism that renders Indigenous and community-held knowledge invisible before evaluation functions, in Fricker's terms, as a structural form of testimonial injustice. The knowledge of uncredentialed knowers is discounted not through individual prejudice alone, but through institutionalized credibility judgments built into funding criteria, accreditation frameworks, and assessment design. This is epistemic injustice operating at the level of architecture rather than interpersonal exchange.

But the framework's limitations for this analysis are also real. Epistemic injustice is primarily theorized at the individual and interpersonal level. It addresses wrongs done to specific persons, remedied through the cultivation of epistemic virtues in individual knowers and hearers. Fricker's proposed remedies (i.e., developing hermeneutical sensitivity, practicing testimonial justice) are oriented toward changing attitudes and practices within existing structures rather than interrogating the structures themselves. More significantly for this analysis, the epistemic injustice framework does not centrally theorize the production of dominant-group positioning. It accounts well for how marginalized knowers are wronged. It does not fully account for how dominant-group knowers are structurally produced as unable to perceive those wrongs, as non-seers rather than merely as uncritical seers. That distinction, as this paper argues, is not incidental. It is where the architectural analysis becomes necessary.

2.3. Epistemologies of Ignorance

The epistemologies of ignorance tradition, developed most influentially by Mills (1997, 2007), Tuana (2006), Sullivan and Tuana (2007), and Proctor and Schiebinger (2008), moved the analytical focus in a direction that addresses this gap more directly. Where epistemic injustice asked how marginalized knowers are wronged, epistemologies of ignorance asked how dominant-group not-knowing is produced, sustained, and made functional. Mills's (1997) racial contract introduced the concept of white ignorance: a structured, motivated, and epistemically productive form of not-knowing that is not incidental to racial dominance but constitutive of it. Tuana's (2006) taxonomy of ignorances, including knowing that one does not know, not knowing that one does not know, and actively produced not-knowing, extended this framework beyond race to a broader account of how ignorance is manufactured and maintained across social hierarchies.

This tradition brings the analysis significantly closer to what the opening section of this paper identified. The administrators and policymakers who cannot see a five-year Indigenous education strategy as legitimate educational planning are not simply uninformed. They have been produced as unable to see it; shaped by educational, professional, and institutional socialization into a form of structured not-knowing that registers as neutral professional judgment. Boler's (1999) concept of the pedagogy of discomfort adds a further dimension. The emotional and psychological investment that dominant-group knowers have in maintaining their comfortable ignorance, and the pedagogical challenge of disrupting it.

Yet even this tradition does not fully close the gap. The epistemologies of ignorance framework addresses the production of not-knowing with precision and power, but it does so primarily at the cognitive, social, and political levels. It does not centre the educational infrastructure (e.g., the specific curricular, pedagogical, and assessment mechanisms) through which this production occurs in institutional practice. It also does not centre credentialism as the operative epistemological mechanism through which ignorance is maintained and legitimized in educational systems specifically. What is needed is a framework that brings the architectural specificity of educational infrastructure together with the insight that ignorance is structurally produced, and that names, precisely, the mechanism through which educational systems simultaneously render certain knowledges invisible and produce the inability to perceive that invisibility in those they most privilege.

The point of departure from this tradition should be stated precisely, because Tuana's (2006) taxonomy comes close to the argument made here. It names a second-order ignorance in which one does not know that one does not know, and it separately names ignorance produced through the construction of epistemically disadvantaged identities. Both effects this paper theorizes therefore appear in her account. Tuana also observes that willful ignorance "often works in tandem with the practice of denying cognitive authority" (p. 14). Even so, the forms of ignorance she identifies remain distinct entries in a taxonomy: practices that can cooperate, rather than a single operation with two effects. Beyond the question of location already noted, the architecture of not-seeing departs from Tuana on two points. First, it claims co-production: the same educational mechanisms, in the same operation, render some knowers unseen and form others as unable to perceive that erasure. Second, it distinguishes not-seeing from ignorance. Second-order ignorance concerns what one does not know; the non-seer's condition concerns what can register as a candidate for knowledge at all. The non-seer is not missing information that would correct the view, but has been formed with an apparatus of recognition that filters certain knowledges out before any question of knowing them arises. Mills's (1997) racial contract, which establishes nonwhite persons as subpersons while prescribing for its signatories an epistemology of ignorance, comes closest to the claim of co-production, but it locates that co-production in the political order rather than in the ordinary, designed machinery of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

2.4. The Gap

Each of the frameworks examined above contributes something this analysis requires. Hidden curriculum theory establishes that educational systems transmit epistemological hierarchies implicitly. Epistemic injustice theory names the specific wrongs done to marginalized knowers within those hierarchies. Epistemologies of ignorance theory demonstrates that dominant-group not-knowing is actively produced, not incidentally maintained. Together, they constitute a substantial scholarly inheritance.

What they do not, either singly or together, fully theorize is the educational infrastructure — the designed and reproduced architecture of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment — through which

these effects are produced simultaneously, sustained mutually, and naturalized universally as the ordinary, neutral functioning of educational systems. Table 1 renders these overlapping contributions and their respective limits in a form that may clarify what remains unaccounted for and why a new conceptual tool is needed to account for it.

Table 1 *Situating the architecture of not-seeing within related theoretical frameworks*

Dimension	Hidden Curriculum	Epistemic Injustice	Epistemologies of Ignorance	Architecture of Not-Seeing
Central concept	The unstated norms, values, and expectations transmitted through educational structures, routines, and social relations, beyond the explicit curriculum.	Wrongs done to persons specifically in their capacity as knowers, including testimonial injustice (credibility deficit) and hermeneutical injustice (interpretive marginalization).	The systematic production of ignorance, particularly among dominant groups, as a function of social position and power arrangements.	The curricular, pedagogical, and assessment infrastructures through which credentialist systems erase epistemic agency while normalizing that erasure as neutrality, rigour, or objectivity.
Primary theoretical concern	Socialization. How schools teach compliance, hierarchy, and dominant cultural norms implicitly.	Epistemic harm to individuals. How knowers are wronged through credibility judgments and interpretive exclusion.	How not-knowing is actively produced and maintained, particularly white ignorance and sanctioned ignorance.	How educational infrastructure simultaneously produces the unseen and the non-seer through the same mechanisms.
What it illuminates	Schools transmit ideological content beyond official knowledge. Hidden lessons in obedience, competition, and passivity shape learners.	Marginalized knowers are systematically discredited or lack conceptual resources to make sense of their experiences.	Ignorance is not absence but presence: actively produced, structurally maintained, and epistemically functional for dominant groups.	Credentialist systems produce differential epistemic effects: misrecognition for marginalized learners, shielded non-perception for dominant-group learners. This becomes naturalized as ‘how education works.’
Level of analysis	Structural and institutional, but focused on socialization processes and ideological transmission.	Primarily individual and interpersonal. Structural dimensions acknowledged but not centred.	Structural and socio-political. Focuses on group-level epistemic positioning.	Infrastructural. Focuses on the designed mechanisms through which differential epistemic effects are produced and sustained.
How it explains dominant group positioning	Dominant-group learners are socialized into norms that serve their interests, but this is framed as ideological absorption rather than epistemic production.	Dominant-group knowers benefit from unearned credibility. They are not explicitly theorized as produced non-seers.	Dominant-group members are actively produced as ignorant of their own dominance. Ignorance is functional and motivated. Second-order ignorance (not knowing that one does not know) and the ignorance produced through disadvantaged identities are theorized as distinct forms that can work in tandem but are not produced by a single operation.	Dominant-group learners are formed with an apparatus of recognition that filters certain knowledges out before judgment. They are produced as non-seers through the same operation that renders others unseen: not a gap in what they know, but a limit on what can register as knowledge.
Relationship to ‘common sense’	Hidden curriculum operates through	Does not centrally address how injustice	Addresses how ignorance becomes	Directly theorizes how acquiescence to

Dimension	Hidden Curriculum	Epistemic Injustice	Epistemologies of Ignorance	Architecture of Not-Seeing
	naturalization but focuses on what is taught implicitly rather than what is rendered imperceptible.	becomes normalized as standard epistemic practice.	normalized and functional but focuses on cognitive and social dimensions rather than educational infrastructure specifically.	credentialist norms becomes mistaken for rigour. The architecture sustains itself by becoming invisible as architecture.
Relationship to 'inclusion' and 'equity'	<p>Inclusion efforts informed by hidden curriculum analysis focus on surfacing implicit norms, diversifying representation, and creating more inclusive classroom climates.</p> <p>Tends to address what is taught and how learners are socialized without interrogating the epistemic infrastructure that determines what counts as knowledge.</p> <p>Can result in adding diverse content while leaving underlying epistemological hierarchies intact.</p>	<p>Inclusion efforts focus on correcting credibility deficits, amplifying marginalized voices, and developing epistemic virtues such as testimonial justice.</p> <p>Remedies tend toward changing attitudes, dispositions, and interpersonal practices rather than infrastructure.</p> <p>Risks tokenistic inclusion—bringing marginalized knowers into existing spaces without changing the epistemic terms of their recognition.</p>	<p>Recognizes that dominant-group ignorance is actively maintained and that inclusion requires disrupting the comfort of not-knowing.</p> <p>Emphasizes structural change over individual education.</p> <p>Less prescriptive about educational design specifically.</p> <p>Can inform critical pedagogy but does not directly address how credentialist structures shape what inclusion can accomplish.</p>	<p>Explains why inclusion efforts frequently fail: reformers working from within the same epistemic architecture reproduce its logic.</p> <p>The architecture absorbs and neutralizes inclusion by appearing to address it while leaving infrastructure intact.</p> <p>Genuine equity requires not merely including diverse voices but transforming what counts as knowing, who is positioned as knower, and how recognition operates.</p> <p>Shifts the goal from inclusion (bringing people into existing structures) to epistemic transformation (redesigning the structures themselves).</p>
Implications for curriculum design	<p>Make the implicit explicit.</p> <p>Surface hidden norms and values.</p> <p>Design curriculum that names what was previously unnamed.</p> <p>Diversify content to challenge dominant ideological transmission.</p>	<p>Design for epistemic inclusion.</p> <p>Ensure marginalized knowers are represented as credible sources.</p> <p>Include interpretive frameworks that allow marginalized experiences to become intelligible.</p> <p>Attend to whose knowledge is cited, assigned, and validated.</p>	<p>Design curriculum that disrupts comfortable ignorance.</p> <p>Include content that makes dominance visible to dominant groups.</p> <p>Challenge the epistemology of the unmarked norm.</p> <p>Prioritize discomfort and reckoning over affirmation.</p>	<p>Move from content diversity to epistemic infrastructure transformation.</p> <p>Redesign what counts as valid knowledge, not just which knowledge is included.</p> <p>Interrogate how abstraction, decontextualized standards, and credentialing function as mechanisms of erasure.</p> <p>Ask not “is this curriculum inclusive?” but “what ways of knowing does this structure make visible or invisible?”</p>
Implications for pedagogical practice	<p>Critical pedagogy.</p> <p>Help learners decode implicit messages.</p> <p>Create spaces for questioning institutional norms.</p> <p>Foster awareness of how schooling socializes.</p>	<p>Cultivate epistemic virtues in educators and learners.</p> <p>Practice testimonial justice (crediting marginalized knowers appropriately).</p>	<p>Pedagogy of discomfort: engage dominant-group learners in confronting what they have been taught not to know.</p> <p>Move beyond additive multicultural approaches toward</p>	<p>Make the architecture visible to all learners—not just marginalized learners who already experience its effects.</p> <p>Teach dominant-group learners to perceive how dominance is reproduced (this is</p>

Dimension	Hidden Curriculum	Epistemic Injustice	Epistemologies of Ignorance	Architecture of Not-Seeing
		Create conditions for hermeneutical justice (developing shared interpretive resources). Attend to whose contributions are heard, believed, and built upon.	epistemological disruption. Recognize that resistance to learning is itself symptomatic.	pedagogical work, not moral exhortation). Position epistemic visibility as a learning outcome. Shift from teaching content to interrogating the conditions of knowing.
Implications for democratic education	Prepare citizens to recognize ideological manipulation and implicit socialization. Foster critical consciousness as foundation for democratic participation.	Democratic deliberation requires epistemic fairness. Citizens must be able to contribute as knowers. Epistemic injustice undermines democratic voice and participation.	Democracy requires citizens who can perceive how their own ignorance has been produced. White ignorance and sanctioned ignorance distort public deliberation. Genuine democratic participation requires reckoning with what dominant groups have been taught not to know.	If citizens cannot perceive how dominance is reproduced through knowledge systems, democratic deliberation is compromised at its foundation. Epistemic visibility is a precondition for meaningful democratic participation. Citizens produced as non-seers cannot deliberate about what they cannot perceive. Democratic education must make the architecture itself an object of inquiry.
Limitations for theorizing the architecture of not-seeing	Focuses on socialization and ideology rather than epistemic infrastructure. Does not adequately address how systems produce differential epistemic effects (non-seers and unseen) simultaneously.	Individual and interpersonal framing. Does not fully address how educational structures produce epistemic positioning systematically. Remedies focus on individual virtue (epistemic responsibility).	Addresses production of ignorance but not specifically the educational infrastructure through which this occurs. Does not centre credentialism as the operative epistemology. Treats dominant-group ignorance and the ignorance of disadvantaged identities as distinct forms rather than as co-produced by a single mechanism.	This paper offers a conceptual tool. Its limitations will emerge through application, critique, and dialogue.
References	Jackson (1968); Apple (2004); Giroux & Penna (1979); Margolis et al. (2001); Freire (1970/2000); Bourdieu & Passeron (1970/1990)	Fricker (2007); Dotson (2011); Medina (2013); Kidd et al. (2017)	Mills (1997, 2007); Spivak (1988); Tuana (2006); Sullivan & Tuana (2007); Proctor & Schiebinger (2008); Boler (1999)	Ahmed (2012); Collins (1979); Fraser (2000); this paper

3. The Architecture and How It Works

The gap identified at the close of the preceding section requires a conceptual tool precise enough to name what existing frameworks leave unexplained. This paper proposes the following definition:

The **architecture of not-seeing** refers to the interlocking curricular, pedagogical, and assessment infrastructures through which credentialist education systems simultaneously erase the epistemic agency of marginalized learners and foreclose the perceptual capacity of dominant-group learners,

producing both the unseen and the non-seer through the same mechanisms, while naturalizing both effects as the ordinary, neutral functioning of education.

Architecture here names not a blueprint but a sediment, the accumulated outcome of choices made across time, reproduced through practice rather than maintained by design. The definition does several things at once. It locates the problem at the infrastructural level; not in individual attitudes, not in policy failures, not in the prejudices of particular educators, but in the designed and reproduced architecture of educational systems themselves. It names credentialism as the operative epistemological mechanism: the system through which knowledge validity is determined by the institutional credentials of the knower rather than the contribution of the knowledge. And it identifies a dual production that no existing framework has centred: the simultaneous making of the unseen and the non-seer through identical mechanisms, sustained under the appearance of rigour, objectivity, and neutral institutional practice.

To understand how this architecture operates, it is necessary to trace its three constitutive mechanisms.

3.1. Abstraction from Lived Context

The first mechanism is the requirement that legitimate knowledge be abstracted from the conditions of its production. Within credentialist educational systems, knowledge earns epistemic authority by demonstrating its independence from the particular: from specific places, specific relationships, specific bodies, specific histories. The more a knowledge claim can be generalized (e.g., decontextualized, universalized, made portable across contexts) the more it registers as rigorous, objective, and educationally valid.

This requirement is not presented as a choice. It is built into the assessment infrastructure: into the design of examinations that strip context from knowledge claims and reward decontextualized recall; into the academic essay form that requires argument to proceed by abstraction rather than narrative or relational reasoning; into the peer review process that treats universalizability as a marker of scholarly quality. Bernstein (2000) identifies these structural preferences as features of classification and framing; the mechanisms through which educational systems define what counts as legitimate knowledge and regulate its transmission. Apple (2004) extends this analysis to show how such preferences encode ideological commitments while presenting themselves as neutral pedagogical choices.

The consequences for knowledges that are constitutively contextual, grounded in specific places, relationships, and intergenerational transmission, are architectural rather than evaluative. Such knowledges do not arrive in decontextualized form because decontextualization would destroy them. You cannot abstract a Guardian's knowledge of a specific coastline from the relationships, observations, and responsibilities through which that knowledge was built without producing something categorically different. The architecture does not evaluate this knowledge and find it wanting. It cannot process the form in which the knowledge exists. Invisibility is produced before judgment occurs.

For dominant-group learners, the same mechanism operates differently. The abstraction requirement aligns with the forms in which their knowledge is already held and transmitted (e.g., text-based, individually authored, institutionally contextualized) and so registers not as a structural constraint but as the natural shape of legitimate knowledge. The mechanism that produces invisibility for some produces transparency for others: the architecture becomes, for dominant-group learners, simply how education works.

3.2. Decontextualized Standards of Legitimacy

The second mechanism extends the first. If legitimate knowledge must be abstracted from lived context, then the standards by which knowledge is evaluated must themselves be context-independent: universal, objective, and applicable across all knowledge claims regardless of their origin. Rigour, in this framework, means the same thing everywhere. Objectivity is a property of the knowledge claim, not of the relationship between the knower and the known.

These standards function as gatekeeping mechanisms. They do not merely describe what legitimate knowledge looks like. They determine, in advance, which knowledge can enter the space of evaluation. A knowledge claim that does not present itself in the authorized form (e.g., the peer-reviewed article, the credentialed testimony, the institutionally validated assessment) is not evaluated against the standard and found deficient. It is not evaluated at all. The standard forecloses rather than assesses.

Ahmed (2012) observes that institutions often function by making certain bodies and certain ways of being feel out of place, not through explicit exclusion but through the accumulated weight of norms that were built without reference to those bodies or ways of being. The decontextualized standard of legitimacy operates precisely this way. It was built within and for a specific epistemological tradition, and it functions universally only within that tradition. For knowledges outside it, the standard is not a measuring instrument but a boundary.

For dominant-group learners, this mechanism is again invisible as a mechanism. The standards of legitimacy that govern what counts as rigorous, objective, and valid align with the epistemological tradition in which they have been educated. They do not experience the standard as a standard, as one possible framework for evaluating knowledge among others, but as the self-evident description of what knowledge is. The mechanism that excludes produces, in the same movement, the perception that nothing is being excluded.

3.3. Institutional Recognition as Proxy for Knowing

The third mechanism is the substitution of institutional recognition for epistemic validity. Within credentialist educational systems, the question of whether someone knows something is answered, structurally, by the question of whether an institution has certified that they know it. The credential (e.g., the degree, the certification, the accreditation) functions not as evidence of knowing but as its replacement (White, 2026). Knowledge without institutional recognition is, within this architecture, not knowledge. The logic has a long history. Collins (1979) argued that the growth of credential requirements owed more to competition among status groups than to the technical demands of work, so that credentials certify cultural membership at least as much as competence.

This substitution has consequences that extend well beyond individual learners. It determines whose voice is authorized in curriculum design, whose expertise is consulted in policy development, whose knowledge is assigned in educational programs, and whose contribution is legible as a contribution at all. The uncredentialed knower — the Elder whose understanding of ecological systems spans generations of relational observation; the community health worker whose knowledge of a specific population's needs exceeds that of any visiting specialist; the Guardian whose stewardship knowledge is constitutive of the land it concerns — is not evaluated against credentialed knowledge and found less valid. They are structurally excluded from the space in which validity is conferred.

For dominant-group learners, the credential functions as confirmation rather than substitution: they have credentials because they know things, and knowing things leads to credentials. The circularity

is invisible as circularity. The mechanism that forecloses epistemic agency for some produces epistemic authorization for others, and produces it as deserved.

The argument does not require credentials to be epistemically empty, and it should not be read as claiming they are. Where a credential serves as sufficient evidence of competence, as a surgeon's licence or an engineer's seal often does, the proxy frequently works, and the public relies on it for good reason. The architecture operates at a different point: where institutional recognition becomes a necessary condition of knowing, so that the absence of a credential is read as the absence of knowledge. Nor does the argument deny that credentialing has served inclusion. For members of historically excluded groups, a credential can offset the credibility deficit that identity prejudice would otherwise impose (Fricker, 2007), and credentials have opened professions and positions of authority that would otherwise have stayed closed. But the architecture predicts the terms of that inclusion. Recognition of prior learning is a clear case: it is inclusive in intent, and it works by translating uncredentialed knowledge into the forms a credential can read. Credentialing extends recognition to new knowers; it does not change what recognition requires.

4. The Dual Production: The Unseen and the Non-Seer

What makes the architecture of not-seeing theoretically distinctive is not the existence of these three mechanisms — each has been identified, in partial form, by prior scholarship — but what they produce simultaneously and through the same operations.

For marginalized and historically excluded learners, the three mechanisms combine to produce epistemic erasure: their knowledge is rendered illegible by the abstraction requirement; their ways of knowing are excluded by decontextualized standards of legitimacy; their epistemic authority is foreclosed by the substitution of institutional recognition for knowing. They experience this as misrecognition in Honneth's (1995) sense, a denial of recognition that constitutes a specific form of harm, positioning them as deficient rather than differently knowing, and often as personal failing, because the architecture has no visible surface against which the structural nature of their exclusion can be perceived. Fraser's (2000) status model sharpens this point for an infrastructural analysis. On her account, misrecognition is less a psychological injury than a matter of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that deny some people parity of participation in social life. The architecture of not-seeing is such a pattern, built into curriculum, standards, and credentials rather than into attitudes. This is the production of the unseen.

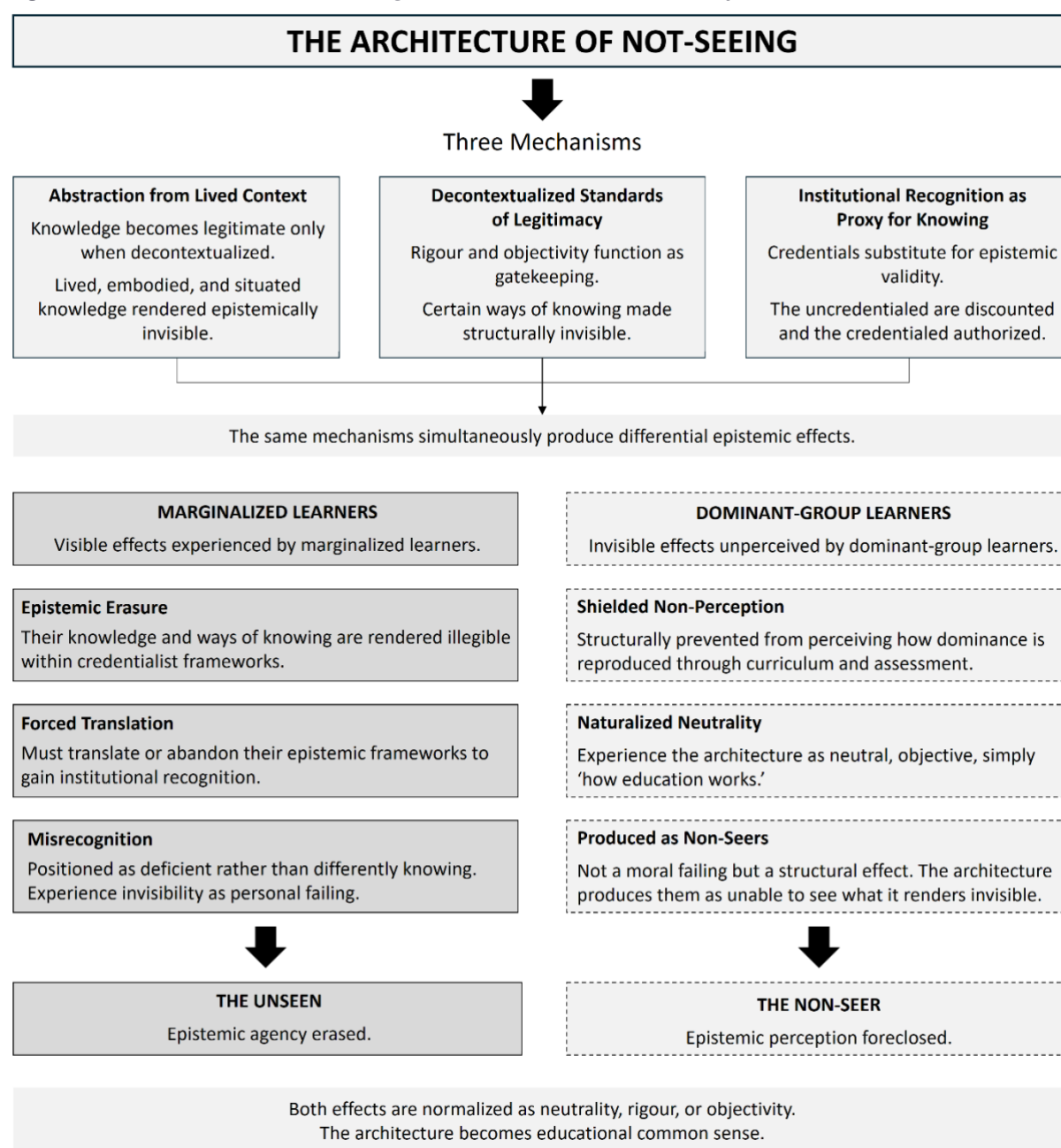
For dominant-group learners, the same mechanisms produce something structurally different. Because the architecture aligns with their epistemological formation, it is transparent to them; not visible as architecture but experienced as the natural shape of education. They are structurally prevented from perceiving how dominance is reproduced through curriculum and assessment, not because they lack moral seriousness, but because they have been produced, through the same mechanisms, as unable to see what the architecture renders invisible. This is the production of the non-seer.

The critical theoretical point is that the non-seer is not a moral category but a structural one. Dominant-group learners are not produced as non-seers because they are indifferent or malicious. They are produced as non-seers because the architecture that erases others simultaneously forecloses their perception of that erasure, and presents both effects as the neutral, objective, rigorous functioning of education. This is why reform efforts so frequently reproduce the logic they intend to disrupt. They are designed by non-seers working within the same epistemic infrastructure,

applying the same standards of legitimacy, in the same institutional contexts, that produced their non-seeing in the first place.

Both effects, the unseen and the non-seer, are naturalized as educational common sense. The architecture becomes invisible as architecture. Figure 1 renders these mechanisms and their differential epistemic effects in a form that may make the structural logic of this production visible in a single view. Note that the architecture of not-seeing operates through the same mechanisms to produce both the unseen (i.e., marginalized learners whose epistemic agency is erased) and the non-seer (i.e., dominant-group learners who are structurally prevented from perceiving that erasure). The dashed borders on the right indicate that these effects remain invisible to those experiencing them. The architecture's success depends on dominant-group learners not perceiving their own production as non-seers.

Figure 1 *The Architecture of Not-Seeing: Mechanisms and Differential Epistemic Effects*



4.1. Why the Architecture Sustains Itself

A reader arriving at this point in the argument might reasonably ask: if the architecture of not-seeing is structural rather than conspiratorial, if it is the ordinary functioning of educational systems rather than the deliberate intention of malicious actors, then why does it persist? Educational systems are not static. They are subject to continuous reform — curriculum reviews, equity audits, diversity initiatives, decolonization commitments, inclusive pedagogy frameworks. If the architecture produces harms that are, at some level, visible to those working within it, why does reform not disrupt it?

This section argues that the answer lies in a feature of the architecture that the preceding analysis has already implied but not yet centred: the architecture produces the very actors who are tasked with reforming it. There is no outside position from which reform can be conducted. Every educator, learner, reformer, and policymaker who engages with the educational system has been educated within it; has been produced, to varying degrees and in varying ways, by the same epistemic infrastructure they are now attempting to change. This is not a counsel of despair. It is a description of the condition that any serious reform effort must reckon with.

4.2. The Educator

Educators are products of credentialist education before they are its practitioners. Their formation as knowers, including their sense of what constitutes rigorous knowledge, valid argument, legitimate evidence, and appropriate pedagogical relationship, occurred within the same architecture they now enact. This is not a failure of professional development or critical reflection. It is the ordinary consequence of being educated: one learns, among other things, what education looks like, what knowledge feels like, and what it means to know something well. Lortie (1975) called this the apprenticeship of observation: long before any formal preparation, future teachers spend thousands of hours watching teaching from the student's desk and absorb its forms as the forms of teaching itself.

When educators design curriculum, they draw on epistemological frameworks that were built within them before they had the critical vocabulary to examine them. When they assess student work, they apply standards of legitimacy that were transmitted to them as the natural shape of academic quality. When they make judgments about whose contributions are rigorous and whose are not, they are enacting an infrastructure they did not design and, in most cases, have never been invited to interrogate. The architecture is reproduced not through bad faith but through professional competence; through educators doing their jobs well, by the standards the architecture has taught them to apply.

This does not mean educators are helpless within the architecture. It means that the work of seeing the architecture, of making it an object of critical attention rather than a transparent medium of practice, is itself a pedagogical accomplishment, not a baseline condition of professional life. Most educators were never taught to see it because the architecture's self-concealment is one of its constitutive features.

4.3. The Learner

Learners are naturalized into credentialist epistemology before they encounter it as a formal educational framework. By the time learners arrive in educational institutions, they have already absorbed, through family, community, media, and prior schooling, the foundational equations of the architecture: that credentials confer authority, that institutional recognition confirms knowledge, that decontextualized reasoning is more rigorous than relational or place-based knowing. These are not

conclusions they have reached through inquiry. They are the epistemological water in which they have been swimming.

The architecture is particularly effective in producing naturalization among dominant-group learners, for whom its standards of legitimacy align with their prior formation. Such learners do not experience credentialism as an imposition or a constraint. They experience it as education simply working, as the reasonable and neutral process through which knowledge is identified, validated, and transmitted. The curriculum they encounter confirms what they already know, in the forms through which they already know it, assessed by standards built in their epistemological image. The architecture's invisibility is most complete for those it most privileges.

For marginalized learners, naturalization operates differently and more violently. They too absorb the architecture's epistemological norms, learning to measure their own knowledge against standards that were not built for or with them, to experience their ways of knowing as deficient rather than different, to seek institutional recognition as the condition of legitimate knowing. The architecture produces in them not transparency but internalized misrecognition: the sense that their epistemic insufficiency is personal rather than structural, a failing to be remedied by harder work within the existing framework rather than evidence of a framework built to exclude them. Fanon (1952/2008) identified this internalization as itself a structural achievement; the colonized subject learning to see themselves through the evaluative framework of the colonizing system, experiencing as personal inadequacy what is in fact the patterned outcome of a system designed to produce that perception.

4.4. The Reformer

Reform efforts within educational systems are characteristically designed and led by people who have been most successfully produced by those systems and who have navigated credentialist infrastructure with sufficient facility to reach positions from which reform is possible. This is not incidental. Credentialist systems confer the institutional authority to reform them on those who have demonstrated their competence within them. The reformer's credential is, structurally, evidence of their formation within the architecture.

This produces a condition that is not paradoxical but architectural. Reform efforts reproduce the logic of the system they intend to disrupt because their designers are working from within the same epistemic infrastructure, applying the same standards of legitimacy, in the same institutional contexts, that produced the problem being reformed. Diversity initiatives that add content from marginalized knowledge traditions without interrogating the standards by which that content will be evaluated, assessed, and weighted reproduce the architecture's logic while appearing to challenge it; what Ahmed (2012) identifies as the institutional capacity to absorb diversity work without structural change, incorporating the language of inclusion while leaving the epistemological infrastructure intact. Inclusion frameworks that bring marginalized knowers into existing epistemological structures without changing the terms of their recognition leave the infrastructure intact. Decolonization commitments that are implemented through credentialist planning processes, such as strategic plans, logic models, key performance indicators, apply the architecture's tools to the task of dismantling it, and predictably find the architecture unmoved. Lorde's (1984) warning that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house applies here with institutional precision.

This is not a criticism of reformers' intentions, which are often serious and sustained. It is a structural observation. Reform conducted from inside the architecture, using the architecture's own instruments, by actors produced by the architecture, tends to address the architecture's surface

manifestations while leaving its foundations undisturbed. The architecture absorbs reform by making reform legible only in its own terms.

4.5. The Policymaker

Policymakers occupy the outermost ring of the cycle but are no less produced by the architecture than those closer to the classroom. They demand credentials as thresholds of legitimate expertise because they were educated in systems that taught them this equation. They mandate standardized assessments because they were assessed by standardized instruments and learned, through that experience, that standardization is the natural form of educational rigour. They resource institutional recognition because institutions recognized them, and they arrived at positions of policy authority through pathways that the architecture designed and maintained.

When policymakers consult experts about educational reform, the consultation process itself reproduces the architecture: experts are identified by their credentials, their testimony is weighted by their institutional affiliations, their recommendations are evaluated against standards of evidence that the architecture has pre-authorized — a process that enacts, at the level of policy, what Fricker (2007) identifies as testimonial injustice and Dotson (2011) as epistemic silencing, systematically underweighting the knowledge most needed to understand the architecture's effects. The knowledges most needed to understand the architecture's effects — the knowledge of communities whose educational needs the system cannot process, of learners whose epistemic agency it has erased, of practitioners who have watched reform efforts fail in patterned ways — are structurally underweighted in the processes through which policy is made. The silent, artificial harmony described in Section 2.1 operates here with particular force. The gap between what the system can process and what communities need is understood, acknowledged in consultation documents and policy preambles, and remedied by policy instruments the architecture has already determined to be legitimate.

4.6. The Cycle Without an Exit

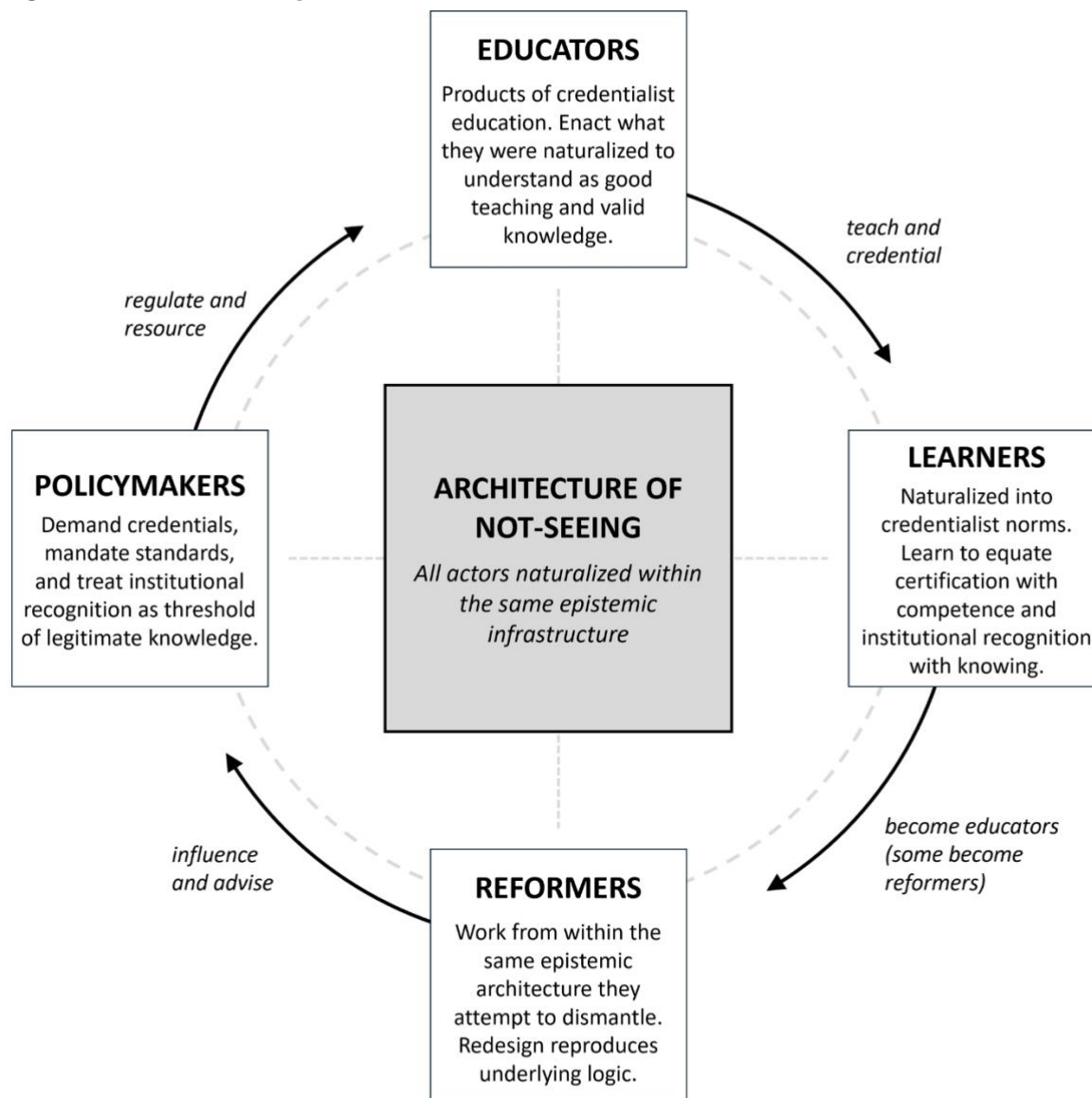
What the preceding analysis reveals is not a linear chain of causation but a self-sustaining cycle: educators produce learners, learners become educators and reformers, reformers advise policymakers, policymakers regulate educators. At every point in the cycle, the architecture of not-seeing is reproduced, not because each actor chooses to reproduce it, but because each has been produced by it and has no position outside it from which to see it whole.

The architecture is self-perpetuating not through conspiracy but through universality. Virtually everyone alive has been educated within it. Its epistemological norms are not the norms of a dominant group imposed on others. They are the shared formation of educators and learners, reformers and policymakers, critics and defenders alike. This is precisely what makes the architecture so difficult to interrupt: the critical tools available to those who would challenge it were themselves produced within it. In this respect the architecture resembles the self-reproducing system Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) described, with the difference noted in Section 2.1: what it reproduces is not only a hierarchy of cultures but a boundary around what counts as knowledge.

Interruption is not impossible. But it requires something different from reform in the conventional sense; something closer to what this paper has been attempting: making the architecture visible to those it has produced as non-seers, not as a moral accusation but as a structural description. This is, at its core, a pedagogical task. Figure 2 renders the self-sustaining cycle in a form that makes its logic visible as a system rather than a sequence of individual choices. Solid arrows indicate the cycle of reproduction: educators teach learners, learners become educators and reformers, reformers

influence policymakers, policymakers regulate educators. Dashed lines indicate that all actors are simultaneously connected to and naturalized within the central architecture; each has been produced by the system they perpetuate. The cycle sustains itself not through conspiracy but through universal socialization into credentialist epistemology.

Figure 2 *The Self-Sustaining Architecture: Universal Naturalization Across Educational Actors*



The architecture is self-perpetuating because virtually everyone alive has been educated within it. There is no outside position from which to reform. Each actor—educator, learner, reformer, policymaker—has been produced by the architecture and reproduces it in turn. The cycle has no natural exit point; interruption requires making the architecture visible to those it has produced as non-seers.

5. What This Makes Possible

The preceding sections have traced the architecture of not-seeing from its constituent mechanisms through to the self-sustaining cycle that makes it so resistant to reform. What the concept makes possible, however, is not simply a more precise diagnosis of educational failure. Naming the architecture creates conditions for a different kind of educational thinking; not a program of reform in the conventional sense, but a reorientation of the questions that curriculum designers, pedagogical

practitioners, and democratic educators are able to ask. This section traces three such reorientations.

5.1. For Curriculum Design: From Content to Infrastructure

The dominant response to epistemological exclusion in curriculum design has been additive. This is what Banks (1993) identifies as the incorporation of diverse content, authors, and perspectives into existing curriculum structures without changing the structure itself. This response is not wrong, but it is insufficient in a specific and now nameable way. Adding diverse content to an existing curriculum infrastructure leaves intact the mechanisms through which that content will be evaluated, weighted, and assessed: the abstraction requirement, the decontextualized standard of legitimacy, the credentialist threshold of authorization. Content that arrives in non-canonical forms, that resists decontextualization, or that is held by uncredentialed knowers passes through the same architectural filters regardless of its inclusion in the syllabus. The architecture absorbs the addition without structural disturbance.

What the architecture of not-seeing makes possible for curriculum designers is a different set of questions. Not "is this curriculum inclusive?" but "what ways of knowing does this structure make visible or invisible?" Not "have we included Indigenous knowledge?" but "does this assessment framework have the apparatus to recognize knowledge that is oral, relational, and place-based as knowledge?" Not "does this program represent diverse perspectives?" but "what epistemic work do our standards of legitimacy perform, and for whose knowledge traditions were they built?"

These are infrastructural questions rather than content questions. They require curriculum designers to treat the architecture itself — the forms of knowledge recognized as legitimate, the standards through which validity is conferred, the assessment instruments through which knowing is measured — as objects of inquiry rather than neutral media of educational practice. This is harder work than diversifying content. It requires interrogating the epistemological foundations of curriculum design rather than its surface manifestations. But it is the work that the architecture of not-seeing makes newly legible as necessary.

5.2. For Pedagogical Practice: Making the Architecture Visible

The pedagogical implications of the architecture of not-seeing differ depending on which learners one is considering, and that difference is itself pedagogically significant.

For marginalized learners, the architecture's effects are already experienced, if not always named. What pedagogy can offer here is what it has always offered at its best: the naming. Making the architecture visible to learners who have been experiencing its effects as personal failing, who have internalized misrecognition as inadequacy, is an act of epistemic restitution. It does not change the architecture immediately, but it changes the interpretive framework through which its effects are understood. The learner who can name the mechanism is no longer simply subject to it; they have a critical vantage point from which its operations become visible as structural rather than natural.

For dominant-group learners, the pedagogical task is different and in some ways more demanding. The architecture is transparent to them; not because they are uncritical, but because it was built in their epistemological image and aligns with their prior formation. Making it visible to them is not a matter of naming what they already experience; it requires disrupting the experience of neutrality itself. Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort names this challenge precisely: dominant-group learners are not simply uninformed about the architecture's effects, they are invested, often without knowing it, in the comfort of not perceiving them. Pedagogical work that makes the architecture

visible to dominant-group learners is therefore not primarily informational. It is transformational, and it will meet resistance that is epistemological before it is moral.

The shared pedagogical goal, across these different starting points, is epistemic visibility as a learning outcome; not merely critical awareness in a general sense, but the specific capacity to perceive how educational infrastructure produces differential epistemic effects, and to recognize that production as structural rather than natural. This is, in the fullest sense, a curriculum goal: something that can be designed for, taught toward, and assessed, though the assessment instruments would need to be built for the purpose rather than borrowed from the architecture being interrogated.

5.3. For Democratic Education: Epistemic Visibility as Precondition

Epistemic democrats have argued that democracy's value lies partly in its capacity to draw on the dispersed, situated knowledge of its citizens (Anderson, 2006), and epistemic injustice scholarship shows how that capacity is weakened when some citizens are not heard as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Less attention has gone to a prior question: whether citizens can perceive the conditions under which knowledge is authorized and excluded at all. The architecture of not-seeing makes that question impossible to ignore. Democratic deliberation, the collective reasoning through which citizens identify problems, evaluate evidence, weigh competing claims, and make decisions about shared life, presupposes that participants can perceive the conditions under which knowledge is produced, authorized, and excluded. Citizens who cannot perceive how dominance is reproduced through knowledge systems are not equipped to deliberate about the epistemic dimensions of public problems, because those dimensions are, for them, structurally invisible.

This is not an abstract concern. The suppression of climate knowledge, the dismissal of Indigenous land-based expertise in resource management decisions, the underweighting of community health knowledge in public health policy; these are not failures of individual reasoning, but consequences of democratic deliberation conducted by citizens produced as non-seers. They bring to public reasoning the epistemological formation the architecture gave them: the sense that credentialed expertise is the natural form of authoritative knowledge, that decontextualized evidence is more reliable than situated knowledge, that institutional recognition is a reasonable proxy for epistemic validity. The architecture's effects are reproduced in the deliberative processes through which democratic societies are supposed to correct their own errors.

What the architecture of not-seeing contributes to democratic education theory is the recognition that epistemic visibility is not a supplementary educational aim but a foundational one. Preparing citizens for democratic participation requires, among other things, preparing them to perceive how knowledge systems produce and exclude; to see the architecture as architecture, rather than as the natural shape of how knowledge works. This is not the same as teaching citizens to distrust expertise, which is a different and dangerous move. It is teaching them to ask, of any knowledge claim and any knowledge system, whose ways of knowing it was built to recognize, and what it was built not to see.

5.4. The Limits of This Analysis

Intellectual honesty requires naming what this paper has not done. The architecture of not-seeing is introduced here as a conceptual tool, a theoretical framework developed through argument, illustration, and comparison with adjacent scholarship. It has not been tested empirically in specific educational contexts. Its relationship to other critical frameworks — critical race theory, disability studies, queer theory — remains largely unexplored. Its applicability across different national educational systems and cultural contexts is asserted rather than demonstrated.

These are not weaknesses to be apologized for. They are the natural condition of conceptual work at the moment of its introduction. A theoretical framework earns its place by opening lines of inquiry that were previously difficult to pursue, not by closing them. The architecture of not-seeing does not offer a finished account of epistemological exclusion in educational systems. It offers a lens through which that exclusion becomes newly visible as a structural condition and through which the questions necessary for addressing it become newly askable.

What those questions make possible, for curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and democratic education, is not a program but an orientation. It is an invitation, not a conclusion. The following section takes that invitation seriously.

6. An Invitation, Not a Conclusion

This paper began in Northwest British Columbia, with two Nations whose educational visions the institutional architecture could not process, not because anyone said no, but because the system had no category for yes in the form they were offering it. Those examples were chosen not as exceptional cases but as unusually clear illustrations of an ordinary condition: the structured invisibility of certain knowledges within educational systems that experience themselves as neutral, rigorous, and open to all who meet their standards.

The concept introduced here — the **architecture of not-seeing** — names that condition with more precision than existing frameworks have allowed. It identifies the three mechanisms through which credentialist educational systems produce epistemic invisibility: abstraction from lived context, decontextualized standards of legitimacy, and institutional recognition as proxy for knowing. It traces the dual production those mechanisms achieve simultaneously, the unseen and the non-seer, and locates both effects within a self-sustaining cycle that reform, conducted from inside the architecture, characteristically reproduces rather than disrupts.

Naming the architecture does not dismantle it. A conceptual tool is not a renovation. But it changes what is possible to ask, and in education, as in other domains of human practice, the questions that can be asked determine the futures that can be imagined. So, this paper closes not with prescriptions but with the questions it hopes the concept makes newly askable.

For curriculum designers: what ways of knowing does this structure make visible, and what does it render invisible? What would it mean to ask not whether a curriculum is inclusive, but whether the infrastructure governing what counts as legitimate knowledge was built with, or without, the epistemic traditions it now claims to include? What would curriculum look like if epistemic visibility were its foundational aim rather than its aspirational supplement?

For pedagogical practitioners: what would it mean to teach dominant-group learners to perceive the architecture, not as a moral failing to be confessed, but as a structural condition to be understood? What does it take to position epistemic visibility as a learning outcome, and what assessment instruments would need to be built, rather than borrowed from the existing architecture, to recognize when learners have achieved it?

For democratic educators: what kind of citizen does the architecture produce, and what kind of deliberation becomes possible when citizens can perceive how knowledge systems determine what can be seen, known, and acted upon? What would it mean to treat epistemic visibility not as a curricular enrichment but as a democratic precondition, as foundational to civic preparation as literacy or numeracy?

These questions are not rhetorical. They are research directions, curriculum design problems, and pedagogical challenges that the architecture of not-seeing makes newly nameable. This paper does not answer them. It offers the concept as a tool for those who will.

One final word about position. This paper has argued that the architecture of not-seeing produces non-seers, that dominant-group knowers are structurally prevented from perceiving what the architecture renders invisible. I am, by formation, credential, and institutional accreditation, among those the architecture has most thoroughly produced as a non-seer. Khatibi's (1983) double critique does not resolve that condition. It names it honestly, and holds it under the same critical pressure the paper applies to the architecture itself. What becomes visible from inside the architecture, looked at steadily and without the comfort of pretending to stand outside it, is offered here as a contribution: partial, positioned, and open to the critique that will sharpen it.

The architecture is old. The not-seeing it produces is ordinary. But ordinary conditions, once named, become visible, and what becomes visible can, at last, become an object of genuine educational attention.

7. Declarations

7.1. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest to disclose.

7.2. Funding

The author declares that the study received no external funding.

7.3. Author contributions (CRediT)

Lawrence A. White: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Resources; Data curation; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization; Project administration

7.4. Data availability statement

There are no supplementary data available for this study.

7.5. Ethics approval

The author declares that this study did not require ethics committee approval. The research was conducted in full accordance with applicable ethical standards and principles. The study involved only publicly available data and document analysis; no personal data were collected and no expert opinion was sought.

7.6. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools

This paper was developed in part through extended dialogue with Claude (Anthropic), used as an intellectual interlocutor rather than a writing tool. All ideas, arguments, and written text are the author's own. Disclosure here is offered as a matter of methodological transparency, consistent with a paper concerned with how knowledge architectures render their own workings invisible.

7.7. Acknowledgements

None.

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