1

Research paradigms & social relations in higher Education

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Scope & Status of Higher Education Research

- Higher Education (HE) confronts fundamental contradictions in terms of scope & status

- HE itself has major responsibility to preserve, extend and apply the body of knowledge

- Body of Knowledge of HE (about curriculum, instructional, financial and organizational dynamics of higher learning) is created in HEIs but it reaches HE community in lesser proportion.

Devid Leslie (2002), Marvin Petersson (2000) and others

- Inquiry in HE is too

- Technocratic,

- Narrow,

- Specialized,

- Inwardly focused &

- Irrelevant to public policy and social practices.

Purpose of Research on Higher Education (HE)

- Is the main purpose to inform organizational and managerial elites about social dynamics of HE? OR

- Is the main purpose to contribute to society's knowledge of itself and its processes (of self organization)?

HER (Higher Education Research)

- HER is either critical of higher education OR

- Employ research methodologies that open ways into 'How HEIs can be more responsive to human interests.

What shows Analyses of the Status of Research in HE in India?

- The analyses of researches in HE in India show that policy makers and administrators do not appear to be interested in applying the body of knowledge about HE to existing problems.

- It's an issue of great concern that needs to be answered.

Types of Higher Education Research (HER)

- Two main types- positivistic and interpretative methodologies

- But both fail to put themselves and HE in sociohistorical contexts (macro level)

- Critical dimensions of social thought and practice do not constitute priorities of discourse/debate about social relations in HE

Assumptions & Implications of Positivism

- Two assumptions:
  Reality is external and objective Knowledge is based on observation

- *Implications:*

- –independence–value freedom –causality – hypotheticodeductive –operationalization –reductionism – generalizations

Theoretical perspectives of positivism

- Positivism argues that:

- 1. Reality consists of what is available to the senses – that is, what can be seen, smelt, touched, etc.

- 2. Inquiry should be based upon scientific observation (as opposed to philosophical speculation), and therefore on empirical inquiry. The natural and human sciences share common logical and methodological principles, dealing with facts and not with values.

- Ideas only deserve their incorporation into knowledge if they can be put to the test of empirical experience.

Interpretivist (Phenomenology/Symbolic Interactionism)

- Rejects the notion of absolute facts

- **The world is socially created**

- **Focus on meanings**

Theoretical Perspective of Interpritivism

- The world is socially constructed.

- The observer is a party to what is being observed. Science is driven by human interests.

- Focus on meanings – trying to understand what is happening. Construct theories from the data (inductively). Use multiple methods to establish different views of the phenomenon.

Epistemological and Ontological Grounds for criticism & alternative of Dominant Paradigms of Research

- Epistemological criticism is based on the CONCEPT OF SOCIETY AS SUBSTANCE NOT AS SUBJECT

- (Substance can be defined as matter with uniform properties and subject can be defined as person or circumstance giving rise to specific feeling, response or action)

- The existing dominant methods of HER emphasize that a view of people is taken as Passive receptacles of external stimuli in their social relations NOT AS reflective and active producers of their environment. Contd…sl13

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- HER gathers knowledge that assume human reality as is an inert 'out there'

- The main aim of HER is to find ways for managing (fixing) numerous conflicts and contradictions in the social organization of Higher Learning by policy planners and administrators.

Ontological Assumptions of HER

- The basic ontological concept of majority of researches in Higher Education (HE) is that social relations within institutions are externally transformed by scientific, policy and managerial elites who possess special knowledge about social reality of HE, existing hierarchies & patterns

- Discourse about HE assumes that scientifically generated knowledge about functions/running of HE can/should be used as instruments to improve efficiency and effectiveness of HEIs and actors within them by policy makers and managers.

Philosophy of Liberation

- Above assumptions/methodological approaches believe that

- 1. social inquiry seeks to establish an identity between thought & object & 2. Goal of inquiry into HE is external transformations of social relations by elites

- The philosophy of liberation maintains that HUMAN FREEDOM can be understood as self conscious self determination

- And the HUMAN FREEDOM is the goal of inquiry into social relations and their knowledge process.

Discussion on the Basic Forms of Research…

- One is based on positivist view of knowledge

- It is focused on structure and patterns

- Measurement strategy is quantitative

- The other is based on interpretive view of knowledge

- It is focused on emergent processes and dynamics

- Measurement is qualitative

Discussion continues…

- But both focus only on " How researcher knows about the social world"

- They do not address ISSUES PERTAINING TO RESEARCHERS' INTERACTION with the social world

- They are limited to the understanding of theoretical and methodological options for research on HE

- Fail to address ontological questions about knowledge and society

Discussion continues as per Habermas

- According to Jürgen Habermas when researchers adopt a theoretical perspective/methodological approach they must ask the following question.

- "Whose interests are served if this theory or method is situated in the social world?'

- Habermas insisted on 'theoretical perspective and social research strategies are not politically neutral BUT have impact on social life in terms of liking (legitimation) or disliking (criticism) for social practices under study

categories of Theoretical Perspectives & Research Strategies-Habermas

- Theoretical perspectives & research strategies can be grouped into following categories on the basis of legitimation of social practice.

- 1. First category is related to epistemological dimension. It is concerned with the response-How the research perspective views people acting within an educational context.

- Are people and their social relations understood as passive receptacles of the external stimuli/immutable social structures?

- Are they understood as the actual or potential creatures of external behaviour environment?

- These are questions of knowledge/epistemology and address the issue whether people are capable of reflecting upon themselves and directing their own behaviour.

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- 2. The second category is related to ontological dimension. It is concerned with -How the theoretical perspective & methodological approach view its own relationship with the object of analysis (people acting in educational context)

- The basic question is whether the perspective understands itself neutral towards and detached from the social world? OR

- It understands itself engaged in interactive relationship with social world?

- What is the relationship between intellectual and social world being studied?

- These are questions about the relationship of scientific knowledge & social being. They address the issue of what are social and political problems and responsibilities of science.

Scientism and Technical Control

- Scientism believes that knowledge is inherently neutral

- It is empiricist

- It is based on positivist epistemology

- Quantitative precision of natural sciences is only appropriate route to understanding of social world

- Scientism is concerned with the production of general laws and prediction and control of human behaviour

- Accr. to Schroyer, although Positivism sees itself socially and politically neutral but it maintains technical control over knowledge and organization.

- Research in HE is dominated by scientistic form of inquiry (positivism)

Interpretive Inquiry (hermeneutics)

- This approach is concerned with the process of social construction of everyday life.

- Mode of interpretation gives an understanding of social cultural life.

- It includes Symbolic interactionism, Phenomenology and post modernist discourse

- Defines the object of analysis in educational research from a more humanistic and interpretive perspective. Contd…on sl.23

…Interpretive Inquiry

- It appears to be reflexive in epistemological sense.

- It assumes that social reality is constructed by conscious, willful agents and seek to discover the process by which humans make sense of their environments.

- But even this approach is not reflexive in ontological sense.

- The research work is not situated in social context OR

- The work of interpretive researchers does not affect the structure of social reality but it merely describes & reflects the social dynamics of HE

- For refer the next slide 24.   contd…

…Interpretive Inquiry

- Most of the studies conducted to study organizational leadership is towards incremental improvement on organizational hierarchy.

- They do not challenge or seek to transform the relationship between leaders and led.

- They fail to articulate a political stance on the structure of social relationship within HEIs (colleges and universities) (Neumann, 2000, Robert Birnbaum, 1988)

Critical Approach

- Critical approaches insists on changes (modification) in the positivist and interpretive methodological approaches..

- It rejects the value neutral and presumed objective self understanding of positivist and interpretive approaches.

- It affirms dialectical relationship between knowledge and society.

- One cannot exist independent of social reality. Contd…on sl 22

…Critical Approach

- From critical standpoint the social reality of HE is what educational research says about it. OR

- How it is defined by cultural, managerial and social elites.

- Educational theory and research must be understood in terms of motives that lead to social and political actions.

- Knowledge has a social base and social knowledge helps or legitimates the social base.

…Critical Approach

- Critical form of inquiry gets little support in India but it contributes to the emancipatory interests of human knowledge based on the notion that human beings must participate as self conscious, self determining agents in social construction of reality.

- It is particularly important in situations where structural obstacles to full social participation have been erected.

- Lukas (1971) says 'Social research is intellectual expression of social revolution.'

…Critical Approach

- The critical approach believes that predominant approaches include the legitimation of hierarchical organizational relationship, exclusionist managerial practices and institutional goals that reinforce existing relationship.

- The critical approach challenges the social reality constituted by existing methods.

- It seeks to understand process of conflict, change, reality construction and emancipation.

- Critical knowledge about the higher learning auguments-human self knowledge and encourages human participation in social processes

- But cannot be used for managerial or exploitative purposes of one entity towards other.

Critical Approach (Gramsci)

- Gramsci (1971) developed further the basic concept of critical inquiry in higher education research.

- Power and domination in alienated social environment is also maintained within the consciousness of people.

- Concept of 'Ideological Hegemony' depends upon ruling class seizing and controlling the means of communication and the means of production of culture and knowledge.

- The unseen power of the ruling class is enhanced in the schools, the workplace and in the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Goal of inquiry into dominant approaches & Realization of freedom as the ultimate goal of HER

- Philosophical basis of the dominant approaches can be traced back to Aristotle's philosophy of mind.

- Its contemporary expressions are there in Empiricism & Kantianism.

- Both assume that goal of inquiry is the establishment of an identity between thought & object.

- Kant did not accept the empiricist route to knowledge and nor its assumption that scientific determinism is compatible with personal freedom.

Contd. from the last

- All positivists (Kant, David Hume, John Locke) believe that human actions can never have status of uncaused events.

- All human actions are subsumed under general scientific laws, no less than natural events.

- Accr. To Kant, science know nothing about human freedom and human values. The research in HE has NOT progressed beyond the concept of SOCIETY AS SUBSTANCE

- Hegel argued that the ultimate test of knowledge is not in its correspondence to an inert "out there" but contribution to human freedom.

- According to Hegel no other concept is more central than his concept of FREEDOM

- He referred to 'REALIZATION OF FRREEDOM' as the absolute end and aim of the world.

Concluding remarks

- We do not know all that we need to know either about method of research or the social relations of Higher Learning.

- We cannot understand the totality of history because new forms of liberation and new forms of oppression are always possible.

- And we need more than empirical observations, intersubjective understandings, or managerial techniques so that the interrelations between/among different components of HE like curriculum, pedagogy, management, administration etc. could be corrected.

- The goal of inquiry must be more than developing recommendations to assist university authorities, management, state and central governments in controlling and managing HEIs.

…concluding remarks

- An important point of departure for scholars and researchers who seek to understand the role of HE in historical context is to acknowledge both method and society as a subject not as substance.

- The methodological challenge is not to generate knowledge to fix the problems but to identify and learn from those forms of social and educational practice that are self consciously self determining.

Thank You