Ethical Dilemmas in Post-Socialist Education Research

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(Re)imagining Utopias

Theory and Method for Educational Research in Post-Socialist Contexts (forthcoming in 2017 with Sense Publishers)

Editors

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Contributors

- Education researchers and practitioners from across different geopolitical spaces, including post-socialist Africa (South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia), the former Soviet Union (Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine), and Southeast/Central Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Poland, and Croatia).

- We deliberately included contributors from foreign (non-local) researchers who conducted research in post-socialist education contexts, as well as the experiences encountered by local researchers undertaking fieldwork in their own countries.

Assumptions

- There is a universal agreement on what constitutes "truth" or "good" education across communities

WRONG

- "Truth" is located *within* a given community and its shared norms and "practices"
- Because social and educational research cuts across communities that may differ from the researcher's own, ensuring the ethical treatment of research participants who are members of such communities can be doubly problematic.

Assumptions

- Most ethics issues in social science research arise as a result of the "interpretive turn" – a move from positivist, qualitative research to the increasing use of qualitative methods accompanying it

WRONG

- All research – quantitative and qualitative has major ethical implications
  - value-laden assumptions are present in any type of research
  - "*social sciences are moral sciences*" (McIntyre, 1982, p. 175)

Assumptions

- Informed consent means participation

WRONG

- True participation may entail removing the distance between researchers and participants to develop trust
- In this case, "professional detachment" – a distance between the researcher and the researched - is sometimes neither an option nor a goal for researchers who attempt to creatively "balance empathy with observation, and scholarship with advocacy" (Turner, 2014, p. 2)

Assumptions

- Most effective collaborative research is based on a division of labor, where local/inside researchers collect data and international/outside experts analyze and interpret the results

WRONG

- We need to be aware of the politics of knowledge production processes, including how the research questions and methods of data collection may be embedded in unequal power relations between the outside/inside researchers and research participants

Key Issues and Questions

- How do we negotiate the differing views on what counts as "truth" in research?

- How do we address the issues of the insider/outsider phenomenon (Western privileged researchers working in non-Western communities)?

- How do we develop culturally sensitive research instruments?

- What is the purpose of our research beyond its contribution to existing scholarship?

Moving forward ethically: Key considerations

- Flexibility

- Reflexivity (ethics in practice versus procedural ethics)

- Positionality

- True collaboration

- Advocacy