Power and Performativity: (Re)Thinking aims of university education in 21st century

Navneet Sharma and Bir Pal Singh Yadav

Abstract

In contemporary times, postmodern concerns on one hand and the demands for equity and justice on the other centralize attention not only to the legitimation of knowledge and developments in university education but also makes us wonder what can be/are the aims of university education in our times and in future not so far away. University and school education have essentially remained a vehicle through which modernity's grand narratives the Enlightenment, ideas of reason and critical reason, individual freedom, progress, etc. are realized. The very rationale of the educational process and the idea of educator and educand are founded on modernity's self-motivated, self-directing and capable of individual agency and experience, whereas in our times both the educator and the educand are inscribed subjects constructed by language, discourse, desire and the unconscious. Accordingly, the excessively strong sense of individualism, progress and achievement we need to re-think about knowledge and its production and dissemination center – the university. It compels us to rethink not only the structural reorganisation but also the aims of university education. Lyotard and Foucault, in their respective writings, dwell upon this concern. Foucault visualizes power from the unusual angle of knowledge – socially legitimated and institutional – how certain 'epistemes' generate power more than others. In Lyotardian interpretation, knowledge is competence beyond efficiency. Power or Performativity as the aims of university education and knowledge in general create more questions than answers: what happens to the idea of social change via education? Is there no scope for resistance? Is knowledge no longer about knowing and exploring the truth? Do we necessarily progress? Is knowledge to be pursued for its own sake or for the power/ performativity and, above all. Do such questions make sense? In our paper, beside reflecting on works of Foucault and Lyotard we attempt to explore the above questions to understand the university, university education, and their aims, if any, and their context in contemporary times.

Keywords: Aims of Education, Knowledge, Performativity, Power, University Education.

Navneet Sharma (Presenter) teaches at Central University of Himachal Pradesh and Bir Pal Singh Yadav is Visiting Professor at University of Iceland, Reykjavik.