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Good Education Research

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Introduction- In “What Is "Good" Education Research?” Karl Hostetler (2005) argues that education research should not only be understood as the researcher’s knowledge of“sound procedures but also of beneficial aims and results” (p.16). The beneficial aims that Hostetler is referring to here all revolve around human well-being. He elaborates that his aim is to “propose that good research requires our careful, ongoing attention to questions of human well-being” (p.16). He goes on to urge education researchers to focus on the ways that can make achievingthis goal possible. Using the No Child Left Behind legislation as an example, Hostetler criticizes current definitions of research as narrow and limiting in their scope because they only see research as experimental studies or quantitative and qualitative methodologiesaiming to yield a set of immediate solutions or actions. These definitions do not pay attention to what good comes from such policies or actions or how they can contribute to the overall well-being of those involved.

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I. Introduction

In "What Is "Good" Education Research?" Karl Hostetler (2005) argues that education research should not only be understood as the researcher's knowledge of"sound procedures but also of beneficial aims and results" (p.16). The beneficial aims that Hostetler is referring to here all revolve around human well-being. He elaborates that his aim is to "propose that good research requires our careful, ongoing attention to questions of human well-being" (p.16). He goes on to urge education researchers to focus on the ways that can make achievingthis goal possible. Using the No Child Left Behind legislation as an example, Hostetler criticizes current definitions of research as narrow and limiting in their scope because they only see research as experimental studies or quantitative and qualitative methodologiesaiming to yield a set of immediate solutions or actions. These definitions do not pay attention to what good comes from such policies or actions or how they can contribute to the overall well-being of those involved.

Hostetler explains that he by no means suggests that researchers in education do not address questions of well-being. On the contrary, he believes the questions are well addressed; however, the problem is how often these questions are asked in research and how serious they are. Therefore, he proposes that researches pay more attention to questions of well-being. Even if research has good intentions, those good intentions alone do not guarantee "good" research. Just like researchers are expected to be knowledgeable about the processes of research and the qualitative and quantitative methodologies, wemust have the same expectations about their knowledge of human well-being. By examining the standards for reporting on empirical social science research in publications by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), one can see what Hostetler is referring to in this respect. The standards, according to the report, focus on what Hostetler calls "sound procedures" with hardly any reference to human well-being. The focus is on the methodologies of qualitative and quantitative research, which follow fixed processes and aim at validating hypotheses. From problem formulation to design to analysis to reporting, the rigidness of these standards seem to validate Hostetler's claim that the focus in education research is on how to conduct studies and not on what good can come out of conducting them. However, this does not mean that these standards are not necessary or that applying them has not led to actions and solutions that have contributed to the well-being of people. The idea is that these standards need to be complimented by better attention and dedication by researchers' to the moral responsibility towards people.

As stated by the 2006 AERA report, the aim for establishing the empirical research standards in such manner is "to assist researchers in the preparation ofmanuscripts […], editors and reviewers in theconsideration of these manuscripts for publication, and readersin learning from and building upon such publications" (p. 33). While this specification of standards is essential, as Hostetler points out, to help the research community and protect research subjects, it also in a way contributes to the assumption that the standards and the procedures overshadow the value or end result of research by highly emphasizing how to do research instead of why research needs to be done. The AERA could, therefore, include a section that pays tribute to the role of research in promoting human well-being and being a factor in the addressing and solving of real human problems.

Missing from the report is also an emphasis on ethical research. According to Hostetler, ethical research requires one's knowledge of and commitment to core ethical ideas like the dignity and humanity of all people and not simply knowledge of how one can conduct empirical research without violating a set of general rules. It is worth mentioning here that good research should result from a strong desire to help humanity and not from mere carefulness not to violate rules or standards. This foregrounds Hostetler's argument that research requires moral philosophy. The mere conceptual or experimental knowledge of the way the environment is does not tell us what we must do for the well-being of its inhabitants. It must be the researchers' and educators' ethical responsibility to raise questions if the well-being of people is threatened.

Although Hostetler acknowledges the importance of empirical findings in answering ethical questions, he insists that "to engage with questions about well-being we must be clear about the necessity to go beyond the empirical. In other words, good education research requires philosophy, in particular moral theory" (p.19). One theorist Hostetler would be at

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odds with on the limits and constituents of good research is Percy Bridgman, a well-known physicist who wrote exclusively on the concept of the scientific method of research. For Bridgman (1959), experimentation and measurement are everything,and "experience is determined only by experience" (491).Bridgman's empirical approach echoes the AERA standards of research which prioritize experimentation.As a physicist, Bridgman sees standards that govern experimentation as the basis for conducting meaningful research. Unlike Hostetler, he is not concerned by the philosophical or ethical sides of research as benchmarks of good research, but thinks that the scientific method of research is what governs and directs empirical inquiries. With that being said, Bridgman's operational theory of empirical research might not be completely at odds with Hostetler's understanding of "good" research if we consider one aspect of it closely. Bridgman sees Einstein's relativity theory as a concept that revolutionizes not only physics but sciences in general. According to Bridgman, what Einstein did was change the criteria of concepts and how they are understood. Einstein proposes the relativity of concepts to the physical operations of the observer in determining its values. According to Bridgman, a termlike "length" had different meanings depending upon the theoretical context under which observations were made. What this means is opening up the possibilities of research and not limiting them to fixed theories or hypotheses. One of the objectives of Hostetler's good research is expanding the possibilities of research and reshaping it to include and focus on the well-being of humans, which is a complex issue that will add richness and depth to research. Bridgeman also emphasizes that concepts are inevitably connected to human experience and that human experience is as important as the standards in the formulation and use of the terms. Bridgman calls this "operational analysis," which entails that fixed rules cannot be applied to validate operations, so the human experience becomes integral in that validation.

Another philosopher who sees a need for adjustment in scientific research, but still differs in his view of good research from Hostetler's, is Karl Popper (1927). According to Popper, one of the shortcomings of scientific research is demarcation which he explains is distinguishing between science and what he calls "non-science." Popper believes that scientific research has limited itself by excluding concepts like logic, metaphysics and psychology from its ranks. Popper is known for adopting the philosophy of Hume, especially in his rejection of induction and celebration of skepticism. He believes that Bacon's and Newton's insistence on pure observation in scientific research is very limiting because, according to him, observation is always selective and influenced by theory. Popper focuses on the importance of experience.He argues that "a system (is) empirical or scientific only if it is capable of being tested by experience" (p. 504). The difference between that and Hostetler's call to open up research is that, for Popper, experience does not necessarily mean human well-being. Popper's aim is not to limit research by celebrating skepticism while Hostetler's aim is to not limit research by the certainty of what research needs to be aim at: human wellbeing.

As we can see from the discussion above, there are more differences than similarities between the theory of good research proposed by Hostetler on one side and the philosophies of empiricism and operational analysis by Bridgman and Popper on the other side. Hostetler prioritizes the moral and ethical aspects of research and believes that more focus needs to be directed to the good that research can do unto people and not only the how or what to study. He believes that the bias that is given to the methods and experiments is a threat to the real humanistic value of research. Bridgman's and Popper's focus on empiricism in research put them on the opposite spectrum, but their philosophies also call for opening up the possibilities of research which, in a way, may align them with what Hostetler aims to accomplish in the long run.

So what can we conclude from this discussion of what constitutes good research? I believe that despite the fact that empirical research in education has come a long way, there is still plenty to be accomplished, which makes arguments like Hostetler's and others who aim to revamp the research standards very timely and worthy of attention. Hostetler's view of good research is a very important sentiment that researchers and educators alike must pay attention to. Doing research for the sake of research is unfortunately still prevalent in today's academic and scientific realms. I believe more research needs to be directed towards the good of humanity now more than ever. What the research community needs now is a concerted and cooperative endeavors for moral education among researchers. Although not all research should be focused on ethical issues, but researchers in general need to understand the relevance between research and what the humanity needs in order to live well and move forward. As we do research, we must always consider what is good or bad for our children and take these considerations into account as we proceed. We also need to realize that results and answers yielded by research are not ends in themselves but new beginnings to be explored. The sole focus is not on perfect results, and research that is wrong in its conclusions can still lead to progress, but educational researchers have an obligation to make sure that the research that is being done is good research that aims at the well-being of people.

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