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Revisiting knowledge and power reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power

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2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/32905

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between knowledge and power through a critical analysis of two seemingly oppositional schools of thought: social realism and decolonial theory. The impetus for revisiting the subject are two contemporary debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonisation in curriculum. The main objective of the investigation is to explore whether the decolonial or the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power. I argue that the accounts fail, to some extent, at this task because of how they each construe the idea that knowledge is socially produced. Social realism foregrounds the idea that knowledge is produced systematically and collaboratively by disciplinary specialists following rigorous methods. On the other hand, decolonial theory emphasises the idea of the social situatedness of knowledge producers in (unequal) relations of power. I argue that reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power requires seeing the ideas of the sociality of knowledge production and the situatedness of knowledge producers highlighted in the two accounts as complementary and conjointly necessary aspects of the production of truthful knowledge. I demonstrate that a synthesis of these two aspects of the idea that knowledge is socially produced is possible through an appraisal of social realism and decolonial theory.