Key Note Abstracts

Alejandra Boni

Epistemic capabilities and epistemic injustice: what's the role for higher education in fostering epistemic contributions of marginalized knowledge producers
This keynote explores the critical issue of knowledge production in universities in two ways: firstly, focusing on how research and teaching could expand capabilities of people not traditionally endorsed as producers of scientific discourse and truth. Secondly, discussing how different kind of epistemic injustice could limit and even block the epistemic capabilities of those actors. For this, we will follow, mainly, the contributions of scholars in the epistemic injustice debate as Miranda Fricker and José Medina. The epistemic capabilities and epistemic injustice nexus will be explored in two empirical cases: the first one is an experience developed in Lagos (Nigeria) using participatory video. The second one is the program Peace and Region, conducted at Universidad de Ibagué (in Colombia), aimed to articulate action frameworks for peace, development, region, territory, and citizenship in local communities through a service learning pedagogical strategy for last year undergraduate students.

Lynn Fendler

Education as Normalization: Social Sciences and Power in Modern Governance
The social sciences were invented in the 19th century to bring scientific reasoning into the administration of social institutions including schooling. The history of the social sciences presents us with a dual agenda of scientific neutrality and social-improvement advocacy. Present day educational research and policies are shaped by the historical values of modern social sciences including efficiency and risk management. These values are shaping what it means to be human in today's world. I take a Foucaultian approach to critical research that recognizes limitations of thought as technologies of normalization, an approach that invites us to imagine that we are freer than we think.

Anna Kosmützky

Theories in Higher Education Research: A Troubled Relationship?
In my talk, I will focus on the relationship between higher education research and its theories. Since the beginnings of the field, constant claims for more theory orientation have accompanied the field's development – from its formative years to its mature state. What does this indicate about the intellectual state of the field? Is this a sign that something is going wrong and the field is in trouble? My argumentation will be grounded in a description of core characteristics of the field: research in the field has a strong application orientation and follows a plurality of thematic trajectories; the field as a whole has an institutional core-cloud structure and is a "tribe on different territories." Based on this description, I will dissect the underpinnings of the claims for more theory orientation of higher education. I will argue that the relationship between higher education research and its theories is troubled because 1) theory generally has several different meanings and content-related facets and empirical and theoretical assumptions move on a continuum. 2) The relationship is also troubled since different source disciplines of higher education research have different needs for theory-based approaches. 3) Last but not least, a source of trouble is that research within the thematic trajectories of higher education research is based on very different theoretical strands, which entails a theoretical plurality. Rather than an obstacle, such a plurality of perspectives and polyarchy of ways of looking at higher education is a vital prerequisite for intellectually vibrant and innovative research.