

Review of: "What do different perspectives on epistemology tell us about teaching and learning?"

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I agree with Dewey's reference of epistemology "as a valuable area of enquiry". However, I have concerns about applying Plato's view of knowledge in teaching and learning where perception is defined as knowledge or where "reality depended on perception that supports existentialism and the existence of multiple truths". There may be a tendency in society to regard perception as the truth, however I disagree that perception should be accepted as knowledge because perception may be skewed or inaccurate. There can be more than one view or multiple views about something, but I believe there can only be one truth, not multiple truths. For example, a glass that appears half full of water to someone (a view) can also be viewed as half empty to someone else (another view) however, the water level could appear as slightly more than half full at a glance to someone else based on their vision (yet another view). These views may be perceived truths (or the existence of multiple truths), but the actual truth lies in measuring the volume of water in the glass to see if it is exactly 50% of the volume it can hold.

It doesn't make sense to say there are 'multiple truths' as this can lead one to question the accuracy of the perception and the margin of error associated with it that may deviate from the absolute truth. Furthermore, just because the perception fits the story, it doesn't mean it is the truth as the context may not be fully realised, although it can be debated and argued as much as possible till we reach some form of agreement or conclusion.

For example, artificial intelligence can create images of people that don't exist (Hill & White, 2020). Seeing the images may lead one to think that the people in the images exist when they don't. So, the truth is distorted here. Having some self-awareness (which can be developed and enhanced through self-reflection or through meditative and transcendental practices) may narrow the margin of error towards the absolute truth or increase the accuracy of the perception but some analysis is still required to confirm its accuracy. Experiencing repeated incidents may lead one to perceive the experiences as truth but they would still require confirmation. This is because the visibility of something may lead people to believe what they see as the truth but what people see may distort the truth especially if they are not aware of the context (such as steps/decisions taken in the background, person's thinking or feelings at the time that they may not be aware of, and so on).

Here's an analogy - A magician cuts his assistant into half, and later shows the assistant to be alive and in one piece. This may lead the audience to think the magician killed the assistant if the first part is the only part that is taken into consideration where the context is not fully understood by the audience and where perception is only based on what is viewed. Obviously, some step was taken by the magician which the audience is not aware of, otherwise the assistant

would not be alive. If the magician was judged by the first part of the act, that could lead to a disastrous outcome for the magician, but if the magician is judged on the whole act, there is a dramatic difference in the outcome.

If what we see is reality and perception of reality is knowledge (per per Plato's view of knowledge), then reality in the story of the magician is an illusion (defined as "perception of something objectively existing in such a way as to cause misinterpretation of its actual nature" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) or "a false idea of belief" (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)) but illusion is not the absolute truth here and it would be misleading to base judgement or decision making on it. We should not teach learners to think in illusory ways or use illusions as a basis for decision making as the thinking would be skewed and neither would it be scholarly. It can also lead to disastrous, ungrounded, unjustifiable and chaotic outcomes. Perception requires further analysis before it is accepted as knowledge, as explained with the analogy of the glass filled with water above.

Plato's definition of knowledge may have been acceptable in his time, but I would be hesitant to apply it in teaching and learning where viewing perception as knowledge or viewing immediate perception as knowledge can be flawed without verification.

In distance learning, where both learners and tutors work in isolation as they navigate the online environment, perception and intuition may play a strong role in contributing to judgement calls. Steps to cross check and verify should be encouraged where possible to confirm the information that we work with.

References

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