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DO YOU KNOW YOUR EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE?

Epistemological reflection can help us to better understand the magnificent undertaking that is science, while making us more perceptive with regard to its limits and ambiguities.

Gérard Fourez¹

“An epistemo-what stance? Do I have one of those?” You might ask! Well, yes, over time, you most certainly have developed your epistemological stance. And it goes so far as to affect your pedagogical practices, guiding your decisions and your actions. However, being conscious of the stance that shapes and motivates you could help you to adjust it as you see fit, to make sound choices based on your convictions and above all, to take action based on your values, with your eyes wide open.

But what does epistemology actually mean? Simply put, it is a “branch of philosophy that makes a critical study of the sciences, for the purpose of determining their logical origin, their value and their impact.”² We could also talk about “theories of knowledge” or “relationships with knowledge.” In fact, epistemology is always with us, and it is everywhere: it structures our thinking, our reading, our discussion, the subjects we want our students to learn, the methods we use to facilitate learning and much more. And yet, we hardly ever hear about it! In his foreword to *Approvoiser l'épistémologie*, an interesting, accessible pedagogical work, Gérard Fourez writes:

“[This book] is not linear; rather, it takes the form of a spiral. This means that the same concept, superficially acquired at the outset, will usually be better understood when the process [... of reading] is more advanced. [... This type of work] is not understood on a first reading [...]. Readers begin by understanding half of it. Then, little by little, things come into sharper focus. [... Here, the reader will have] to learn to consider what lies between black and white. Contrary to what some people might think, this area is not grey, but a rainbow!” (2003, p. 18-20) [translation]

The same holds true for this issue of *Pédagogie collégiale*, which features a special section on the theme of epistemology. A first reading of the articles in our special section should enable you to become familiar, if you have not already done so, with the various concepts associated with this branch of philosophy. It should also provide you with a sense of the opportunities that epistemological reflection provides to anyone who wants to improve their practices in education. A second reading may be necessary, as it will likely give you the opportunity to further your understanding of the connections between the concepts explained in these pages, to further explore the many issues that motivate you and to gain a good grasp of the impact our epistemological concerns have on pedagogy and didactics.

I'd like to suggest that you start this special section by reading an article in which I attempt to situate epistemology with respect to the reality of college education. This is followed by an article about the significance of the relationships that teachers and students have with knowledge in terms of education. Another article presents a series of questions that will help you define your conceptions and your beliefs. Lastly, we include a review of a work dealing with the role of error in teaching and learning³.

In addition to these four articles and a summary of the Awards and Honourable Mentions given at the AQPC Symposium in June 2015, this issue of the journal also contains a text in which a team of researchers report on the qualities of a motivating teacher and a number of practices that foster educational success, based on the findings of a study conducted in a French language course. In the last article, Mr. Claude Lessard, President of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation provides a profile of this organization, which will benefit all our readers⁴.

Enjoy! ◀

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¹ Taken from *Approvoiser l'épistémologie*, Brussels, De Boeck, 2003, p. 10 [translation].

² This definition is taken from the *Antidote* dictionary [translation].

³ This article is available in French only.

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