

Contested Terrain: Diversity, Writing, And Knowledge

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"EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIVERSITY" IN EDUCATION: PHILOSOPHICAL AND DIDACTIC CONSIDERATIONS¹

Abstract: A recent but widespread view holds that ethnic or cultural groups have their own distinctive epistemologies, that epistemologies are also gendered, and that these have been largely ignored by the dominant social group. A corollary of this view states that educational research is pursued within a framework that represents particular assumptions about knowledge and knowledge production that reflect the interests and historical traditions of this dominant group. The call for epistemological diversity becomes problematic when it conflates epistemological pluralism and epistemological relativism. More often than not, in such arguments for different, diverse, alternative, decolonized or demasculinized epistemologies some relevant philosophical issues remain unresolved, if not unaddressed altogether. What exactly do these claims about epistemological diversity mean? Do these ways of establishing knowledge stand up to critical interrogation? Moreover, how do they relate to traditional epistemological distinctions, e.g. between knowledge and belief and between descriptive and normative inquiry, and to epistemologically essential components like warrant/justification and truth? This paper examines some of the mistakes and misconceptions involved in appeals to diverse epistemologies. The concern is not just whether or not a word ('epistemology') is being misused, but also (and importantly) whether or not the issues dealt with in epistemology (a complex field that has evolved over a long period of time) are being given short shrift, if not ignored altogether.

Keywords: Educational research; epistemological diversity; pluralism; relativism.

'Epistemological diversity'

My concern in this article is to demonstrate that so-called 'epistemological diversity', an idea frequently employed in postcolonial and feminist theory (within

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