

Reality vs. Perception

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Educating oneself is the act of being curious, asking questions, expanding ones knowledge base, and understanding how little is known.

The general perception is that once a person is knowledgeable they have more answers. The truth is that they have more questions. Our education system is based on fact regurgitation. Testing a students knowledge base for information is utilized rather than fostering interest, encouraging asking questions, and working towards true academic curiosity. The current perception of intelligence is based on how many facts a person knows. The reality is that once a person becomes more and more educated in a field, they begin to realize how little they know. They realize how many more questions they have. William Butler Yates said "Education is not about filling buckets, its about lights fires."

Example One: The founder of modern physics, Erwin Schrödinger, states "In an honest search for knowledge, you quite often have to abide by ignorance for an indefinite period." Schrödinger found that he had to be comfortable with his questions unanswered. The more Schrödinger understood about a subject, the better more in depth questions he posed. His reality is at odds with the general perception that a man with a nobel prize would have all of the answers.

Example Two: Immanuel Kant is one of modern philosophy's great thinkers. His contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy hold great influence. He is generally thought of as a deeply knowledgable person and academically accomplished. Kant founded the principle called 'Question Propagation'. He states that every answer given on a principle of experience begets a fresh question. Through the understanding of this principle one would look more to the questions rather than in the mindset of question leads to answer.

Neuroscientist Stuart Firestein's 'Ted Talk, In Pursuit of Ignorance' highlights the perception of scientific inquiry is there are guaranteed solutions. Many think of scientific process as peeling an onion, layer by layer and in the end the scientist finds an answer. Firestein explains that in

science as knowledge on a subject is expanding the answers to one question only create many more inquires.

Critical Commentary:

This principle can be restated in Aristotle's phrase "the more you know, the more you don't know". I can see its application all around me. I currently attend an 'ivy prep' high school with strong academic demands. SAT scores and test prep are very important to a students futures, but this does not necessarily make intelligent students. Fact regurgitation is rampant, but academic inquiry, curiosity and questioning is less common. I think online learning and the ability to access knowledge through non traditional means will allow for more self directed inquiry. This creates more curiosity, and more questions, which makes for an intellectually solid society.