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EDLE 800: Shaklee

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Journal Reflection #2

[Note: Please also refer to my post on the Discussion Board in answering this Journal’s prompt.]

Kuhn has shifted my perspective on Descartes.

In Kuhn’s discussion in his seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he discusses the role of a scientist as one who seeks understanding in the world through close scrutiny and using empirical detail (Kuhn, 1970). In the process, Kuhn reminds us we are scrutinizing and assessing in a particular moment in history through a particular cultural lens and contextual framework. Moreover, the researcher is engaging in a process of analysis particular to him or her, which incorporates personal history, culture, worldview, geography, and so forth. That analytical process can be blind to the researcher when it seems “obvious” – sort of like driving a car on the road to reach the market is an obvious way to get there. Thinking about this process – driving on the road – is not something I would consider cultural or contextual, but in fact, it is. For example, when thinking about the future, perhaps people will use hovercraft to move from one place to the next, which would then require an explanation of how we, in 2020, knew how to move in the same way, thereby making the “obvious” in fact, not.

Or, looking back, I consider Descartes. I had been critical of his reasoning because it seemed tightly linked to his ontology of God (Descartes, 1996). But I missed the point: Descartes’ offer to advancing philosophical discourse was demonstrating a *process of thinking* that was new. To use reason and analysis by moving through an if/then scenario seemed so “obvious” that it did not occur to me to call out this process, just as it wouldn’t occur to me to call out driving on a road as my process of moving from point A to point B. Ellerton was making this point when he noted the Enlightenment formally introduced reason as a way of knowing (2017). The trouble with reason when assumed to be “objective” is that even reason is culturally based, contextually based, and limited to only what we think we know. An example is how quantum physics revolutionized our way of knowing by radically shifting our knowledge of how atoms function, and how the nature of particles interact.

David Weinberger discusses Kuhn’s insight of our *process* being a cultural construct, i.e. Kuhn uncovering an obviousness within our culture in how we approach analysis (2013). A problem for Kuhn, however, is his uneven definition of paradigm (Weinberger, 2013). Here I’m reminded of Deborah Stone’s depiction of the use of numbers. The act of using numbers to describe a way of knowing something is by definition a political, cultural and contextual act (Stone, 1997). When Stone discusses the comparative between numbers and metaphors as both containing inclusive and exclusive elements, I wonder if Kuhn’s critics are interpreting his description of paradigm using different exclusion and inclusion measures than Kuhn intended. Perhaps the critics perceive different definitions of a paradigm, because they are seeking to categorize paradigm within a construct they know. Was Kuhn introducing a new paradigm that could incorporate all of those definitions? Possibly. The dilemma is that a shift in paradigm thinking occurs when proponents are both attracted away from a competing mode to a new paradigm, and that the new paradigm is adequately open-ended with various problems to solve (Kuhn, 1970). If Kuhn’s new paradigm is not clear to his critics, then they cannot adhere to his new paradigm as a replacement for the old one.

This line of thinking connects to international education and building global competence – my areas of interest. Developing global citizens in schools can be a radical paradigm shift for many teachers, administrators, parents, students and policymakers. This concept means naming “building global competency” as one of the many purposes of school; it means defining a common definition of “global competence” or “global citizenship” within a certain geography/culture. (Note: the current distinction growing between Chinese global competency and the western world’s definition is interesting and revealing of the different cultures and ontologies contained therein.) It means accepting the importance of adding “global citizenship” as critical learning; it means applying a cross-sectoral mindset over typically siloed courses. It means a change in teacher education; and many, many other facets. This paradigm shift likely feels too massive to some educators. Kuhn calls us to pay attention to the historical lessons of challenge when building consensus. An element in this challenge is clarifying the boundaries of the paradigm, which is not clear yet, and as Kuhn mentions, sharing a paradigm does not equal sharing the same set of rules. The “natural family,” that is, a common set of characteristics within a paradigm, of a global citizenship paradigm is coagulating, but it is not settled into form, and it is certainly not understood globally. I suspect a great part of my research and professional endeavors will be linked to building this paradigm.

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**Beverly Shaklee said…**

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Very good connections and glad you discovered additional insights about why we read Descartes work. It is important to try to make visible the invisible or the 'taken for granted' nature of ideas and concepts in research. So for instances in your reflection to note that working toward global competency in education would be a shift in teacher education - so I might ask how do you know that? On what basis can you make that statement thinking about making the foundation visible - so are you thinking that it doesn't exist at all? It is absent from teacher education? Absent in some countries? This is the part of examination of your own thoughts and biases or paradigms even before you begin your work.
Warmly
Dr. S