Abstract

Personal epistemology, the beliefs of individuals about knowledge and knowing (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997) play a crucial role in various aspects of cognitive processes and learning, such as argumentation, problem-solving, and conceptual change learning. Despite this importance, children’s personal epistemology is rarely subject to empirical research. This interview study conducted with ninety-eight 4th graders revealed not only that children around the age of ten are able to verbalize epistemic beliefs, but that the latter are more diverse and profound than initially expected by the research community, such as different knowledge definitions, beliefs about the origin, acquisition, and verification of knowledge. It was demonstrated that children held similar epistemological positions as adults, such as absolutist, multiplists, and evaluativist (Chandler, Hallet, & Sokol, 2002; Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002); except that these are based on a less broad and abstract conceptualization of knowledge. Furthermore, the results imply that teachers’ personal epistemology and classroom education in general have an impact on students’ personal epistemology. Stemming from the current results and literature on personal epistemology and curriculum and instruction, the Educational Model for Personal Epistemology Enhancement (EMPEE) is introduced and provides a framework for how different classroom factors can influence learner’s personal epistemology and how these factors can be taken into account to enhance personal epistemology in a diversity of educational contexts. Several educational implications and suggestions for future research are discussed in terms of the model.
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