Thought Paper:

Philosophy of Constructed Knowledge

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On Page 37, von Glasersfeld states: "… to assess the truth of your knowledge you would have to know what you come to know before you come to know it". He also says "… it appears that knowledge is not a transferable commodity and communication not a conveyance" (p. 48).

Explain these quotes and what they mean for constructivist teaching.

The world is only known through one's perceptions and experiences. As one cannot rely on one's own knowledge to authenticate that same knowledge, outside sources must be sought for verification. However, it is impossible to experience the world through the frame of another's senses, or to internalize experience into the conceptual structures held by another. With the individualized construction of knowledge, through experience, how does one know how another possesses the same knowledge? Further, how can one compare one's knowledge to an absolute truth, when "the truth" has also been constructed by another? This lack of homogenous structures indicates that knowledge cannot simply be transferred, as it does not exist in the same state across persons. Knowledge must be constructed, using information already in memory. In addition, if one assumes individual concepts, or even words, are understood even slightly differently by each person, then communication must reflect the interplay of various structures to reach a collective understanding. That is, "… knowledge is not a transferable commodity and communication not a conveyance". (Von Glasersfeld, E., 2008)

As an educator, one must be aware of one's own conceptual knowledge structures in order to provide a comparator for student knowledge. While an educator's knowledge is not "truth", it is the nearest approximation available. In addition, one must be able to visualize the conceptual structures of students, both current and destination models (Von Glasersfeld, E., 2008). Communication is necessary to create the visualization needed to guide students from preconception towards adult understanding, and to encourage student reflection upon his own knowing. For example, before the concept of multi-digit addition can be constructed, communication and reflection must be utilized to identify a student's current concept structures such as; one-to-one correspondence, place value, and interpretation of the "+" symbol. Once congruent base concepts are in place, the student can build upon those structures to construct a successful model of multi-digit addition.

References:

Von Glasersfeld, E. (2008). Learning as a Constructive Activity. *AntiMatters, 2(3),* 33-49. Available online: http://anti-matters.org/articles/73/public/73-66-1-PB.pdf