A coffee house in Jerusalem was an interesting place to commence reading this collection of articles on cultural diversity and epistemology. An amazing diversity of people passed on the street. Tourists, pilgrims and residents, Jews, Moslems and Christians, Europeans, Africans and Asians, men and women along with stall owners, workers and security police. Each of them sees the world through an amazing diversity of perspectives that on the surface seem to give coherence to the place but are probably mutually exclusive – and so the machine gun carriers mingle. Each passer-by stands for a particular version of what Israel (or Palestine) means and each is heading to address their God in neighbouring but theologically distant shrines, the Mosque on Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall and further away the Christians Holy Sepulchre.

Many of the most important issues raised in this interesting publication were being acted out on this street. The ultra-orthodox Hassidic community see the Temple, Jerusalem, the ownership of land and the Israeli state in ways that are remarkably different to that of the Arab from East Jerusalem. It would colour and shape their views of education too: What should be taught? How should it promote values? What values should be taught? Should the State support education for any or some or all of the multiple perspectives in this rich tapestry of traditions? What views would a woman or a man have that would add another dimension to these perspectives? The ‘epistemological stance’ of the researcher or student of education is normally articulated in this framework.

However, this edited collection sets out to argue that this is not one’s epistemological position but instead a set of beliefs. These beliefs may indeed inform research or our educational thinking and practice. Beliefs are not the same as knowledge. Traditionally, epistemology deals with knowledge and what is known. To involve oneself in the activity of epistemology is to take a more critical and philosophical approach to what is known and how we know rather than stating one’s beliefs. To go beyond one’s beliefs so that these beliefs are well justified on the basis of sound and critical enquiry is to engage in what is traditionally and philosophically known as epistemology. Not all the things we believe may be justified or labelled as knowledge and preserving this distinction is important for research and education. For a belief to be known there must be justification (or a warrant) so that it stands up to scrutiny and it must be true. It is this validation of knowledge that distinguishes beliefs from epistemology.

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