Epistemic Vigilance for Teachers

**Epistemic vigilance is a kind of mental filtering mechanism which vets the quality of the information that tries to enter our cognitive system.**

1. **Filtering Information: How Cognition and Relevance Theory Help Us Focus on What Matters**

* Our cognitive system helps us process all kinds of information every day—everything from schoolwork to things we hear from friends.
* **Relevance Theory** proposes a theory about human communication which claims that the cognitive system seeks to improve its knowledgebase by acquiring information both *important* (relevant) and *useful* while keeping processing cost minimal. So, when someone tells us something, our cognitive system quickly has to assess whether a given piece of information is worth paying attention to or if it’s better to ignore it.
* This is where **epistemic vigilance (EV)** comes in. It’s like a filter in our brain that helps us figure out what’s worth focusing on. EV helps us avoid wasting cognitive resources on information that isn’t helpful or reliable, allowing us to pay attention only to things that are meaningful and trustworthy.

1. **Thinking and Judging: Using EV to Make Smart Decisions about Information**

* Part of our cognitive system evaluates information critically—using skills like inferential reasoning and character judgment. These skills help us decide whether information is true or believable, and worth it.
* **Epistemic vigilance** is part of this critical thinking process. When we hear new information, EV kicks in and helps us judge if it matches what we already know or if it comes from a source we trust.
* EV helps us avoid being misled by rumors, exaggerations, or false information. It prompts us to ask ourselves, “Does this make sense?” or “Can I trust this?” This way, we don’t just believe everything we hear, but we make critical decisions about what to accept and remember.

1. **Learning from Others: Using EV to Understand and Trust Information We Hear from Others**

* A big part of learning happens through communication—by listening to what other people tell us. We learn from teachers, friends, family, and things we read or see online.
* **Relevance Theory** explains that we generally expect the information others share to be useful and important. However, sometimes people can accidentally share things that aren’t true, or they may be ill intentioned.
* This is why we need **epistemic vigilance**: it’s a mental tool that helps us decide when information from others is reliable. It keeps us from believing everything we hear, allowing us to only accept information that seems accurate and helpful.

1. **Epistemic Vigilance: Evaluating Both *Content* and *Source***

* Epistemic vigilance isn’t just about deciding if information makes sense; specifically, it focuses on **two dimensions**: the *content* of the message and the *source* who is sharing it.
  1. **Evaluating Content**: When we use EV to look at *content*, we’re asking questions like, “Does this information match what I already know?” or “Is there any proof to back this up?” This helps us judge if the message itself is likely to be true.
  2. **Evaluating Source**: EV also helps us think about *who* is sharing the information. We ask questions like, “Is this person knowledgeable?” or “Do they have a reason to exaggerate or lie?” This helps us decide if we can trust the person giving us the information.
* When we use epistemic vigilance to check both the content and the source, we can make smarter choices about what to believe. This helps us focus on reliable information and avoid being misled, making communication more effective and helping us learn better.