



Is this what it looks like?

There is a wide gap between what we observe and what we understand. That is the origin of all philosophical inquiry – what is it that we see? Is what we see really what it is? Or are we dealing with delusions, mental constructs or poor conceptions of the mind? How do we know that what we hold for real is what it is?

The following inquiry is a simple and amusing one, but it has a wider effect, because it makes us aware of the criteria that we apply in the interpretation of every day observations. The quest for what the outer world is like starts here.

Approach

1. Make a display of about fifteen different items on the table.
2. Take some time to inspect the items.
3. Each participant determines for himself, 'Is this item what it looks like or is it not what it looks like?'
4. Start the conversation and compare the outcomes per item, 'Is it what it looks like or is it not?'
5. Now reflect on the criteria used for making this distinction. Write them down, on a flip chart, for example.
6. Reflection – 'Was this a conversation, or did it only look like a conversation?'

Suggestions for the items.

In case you want some suggestions for what kind of items one could choose, think of the following ones:

- a small bag, holder or container of which the specific use is unclear;
- items from anybody's desk that are easily recognized: paperclip, staples, envelope, eraser;
- items that only some may be familiar to, for example, tools for carpentry or mountain climbing;
- items that look ok but do not function, for instance, a fountain pen without ink, empty spray can;
- a colourful advertisement with pictures of all kinds of articles;
- a battery, some foreign coins, play money, a little doll;
- a credit card or membership card that is beyond its expiry date;
- something mini, like a tiny hour glass, compass, or thermometer;
- and so on ...

Enjoy!

