

*'Learning Portfolio'*

Vice-Chancellors Course: Creaking Knowledge

VCUG2001

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## Learning Portfolio – Speaking Notes for an Oration

Look to your left.

Look to your right.

Together, we have been on a journey of discovery. Some of your minds have been on board the Starship Enterprise with Chris, others flying their own cruisers near by and some in a galaxy far, far away. I see an X-Wing and a Naboo star fighter. But when I stop the nerd fantasy clearly designed to try and impress the engineer in the room and begin to look at you all I see a small group of the most affluent and potentially influential people in the world.

It would be safe to predict that under current circumstances, most of us here today will earn over \$47,500 a year. This places us in the top 1% of all incomes globally.

Despite this privileged position, many of our fellow students at the Australian National University are unable to see their truly incredible wealth and the possibilities that this provides them. Mediocrity has become the norm.

We dream of finding a stable job, buying a nice car, falling in love, having a family... three kids maybe. A mortgage is on the cards along with a nice house and a dog called Rover. *Just enough to be.... comfortable.*

### ***Comfortable.***

While being *comfortable* at ANU, with our beautiful grass, trees, ducks and terrible Wi-Fi, I have had the opportunity to, on the odd occasion, actually sit down and think. This course in particular has provided me with time to reflect on the 'creation' of knowledge.

Over the past few weeks I have been exploring this concept of a 'gap' in my knowledge. After much pondering, I have landed on what I think is the most significant 'knowledge' challenge for the people of the world. It is something debated, researched and written about by millions.

My gap in knowledge is 'how to be brilliant'.

Now, the word brilliant sounds great. But what I might mean is excellent, or extraordinary, or fantastic, or perfect, or maybe even incredible. Basically, awesome. Or as Barney Stinson would put it, *Legendary*.

The most important part of my reflection on knowledge creation is in realising that there is a next step – *using it*. Knowing how to acquire and effectively use our knowledge is perhaps one of the greatest skills one can acquire.

But it is not the most important knowledge.

*The most important knowledge that one can gain is the ability to acquire a goal and then holistically apply oneself to the series of tasks that need to be completed to reach that goal.*

**I believe that gaining this knowledge gives you the capacity to be brilliant.**

In Australia, we generally don't encourage each other to strive for brilliance in our lives, in a holistic sense. We love sport, cars, fashion, fishing etcetera but as a general rule, we don't pursue excellence.

This cutting down of our 'tall poppies' is a cultural phenomenon. We occasionally celebrate excellence yet few of us strive to acquire it and I would argue we just don't know how. It is a gap in our knowledge, a gap that stops us from **being brilliant**.

Let us take a moment to reflect on that.

Many of us are unable to realise that we have the capacity to be brilliant.

You may be still asking yourself 'what do you mean by brilliant?' and of course, I recognise that everyone will have a different construction of brilliance. However, I believe we can all recognise that a definition could easily be *'utilising our time and resources in the most effective way possible while working our hardest to be the best we can be in any given pursuit.'*

This definition is that of an individual who loves to be alive. In the words of the great Patrick Hernandez; 'we were born, *born to be alive*'. And to be *truly* alive we must acknowledge and appreciate our existence and 'max out' its potential. As Eleanor Roosevelt said 'life must be lived and curiosity kept alive. One must never, for whatever reason, turn his back on life.'

***So the gap in knowledge that I am exploring is the knowledge of 'how to be brilliant'***

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Over the past six years, while studying at "the Australian National University", I have met thousands of students who have all come to this place seeking to improve their life in some way. Some seek to expand their mind, searching for a greater understanding of the world and the discipline that interests them most. Many want a pathway to create a better future for our planet. Others simply look for a ticket, the piece of paper at the end of their time here that will grant them access to the next level.

While knowledge is constantly being created, the pace and depth of its generation must be examined. I would argue that many waste potential learning time in frivolous activity or by 'chatting' with friends in the library instead of studying. I, most of all, am guilty of this.

Upon reflection, I realise that the most consistent conversation topics amongst students is the bemoaning of lecturers and assessment, the frivolity of the previous week in residences and the latest love interest of said students. Buzzfeed, Facebook and Tumblr seem to occupy the time of most students, avoiding study through 'procrastination' as if their time here was better-spent enjoying life due to the horror that will be full time employment.

Perhaps the millions of dollars being spent on undergraduates really is focused on creating sharable online content for social media platforms, making people happier and dulling the minds of millions so that the Government can get away with a range of different policies some would consider immoral. I'm not a socialist but who really knows these days.

While completing this course I often wondered *why it is that we have universities*. If the idea of a university is to create an institute for the brightest minds of a nation to learn more, debate and create new knowledge, then surely university has failed the majority of the undergraduate population here. I spoke with a fellow student a few days ago and remarked that for this portfolio we would simply need to compile a few thousand words of 'wank' and click submit.

*I'm probably right.*

However, that is not what I am doing with these precious three thousand words. No. I am not standing here and talking about how *interesting* the knowledge gap is in colour theory or politics. Why would I have bothered, I'm hardly qualified and to research that properly would require many hours of precious time and I wouldn't *really* get to think.

No, indeed that was a ridiculous idea that will help no one. Not you, or me.

What I have done is explored and reflected on my university experience and explored what I believe to be the gap in knowledge that stops most students from becoming truly successful.

The gap in knowledge around 'how to be brilliant' is important not only for our cohort of 'thought leaders' at ANU, but for society. It is what I believe to be the greatest failure of our education system and one that must be addressed if Australia is to thrive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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So what are we looking at? Well firstly we are looking at people. Secondly, we are looking at their actions and ability to 'do life right' or 'get it done'. When looking at people and their actions we're focusing on their ability, or in this case – lack of ability, to apply themselves to a series of tasks to achieve certain goals.

Brilliance is not something that you come across every day. This is unfortunate but not surprising. To be brilliant, or to allow oneself to be brilliant, requires the development of a number of key knowledge areas. Rather than just 'knowing' something, these knowledge areas must become lived parts of our existence. A

way of life.

After much thought and research on ze Google, I have decided that the most important areas of knowledge for brilliance are

*1 a philosophical or religious set of core values that lead to an understanding that we are lucky to be alive and an appreciation for the time we have here, leading on to a strong sense of purpose,*

From the religious and spiritual cultures in the South Pacific and Indigenous Australians, to the core values of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, it is clear that guiding principals are crucial for excellence. As Sun Tzu said, 'know thyself, know thy enemy, a thousand battles, a thousand victories.' I believe this is fundamentally true of values. At no point during my early childhood at home or at school, right up until I was 17, did I ever look at my values and beliefs properly. Since then it has only been due to a number of unique opportunities that forced me to do so, that I actually critically engaged with myself on this topic. Knowing your values, what drives you, where you want to see change and what you believe is so important for achieving excellence. Knowledge and a strong connection to ones values helps to act as an important anchor during difficult times, allowing you to gain self discipline and resilience for a reason you connect with.

*Which brings me to number 2; a strong understanding of and a lived realization of self-discipline and resilience, maximizing time.*

The ability to understand and achieve self-discipline is crucial to excellence. Have you ever watched Dodgeball? There is a scene when an old dodgeball master is training the young and, let's face it – pathetic, team. He gets them in a basketball court then starts throwing mechanics tools at them. 'If you can dodge a wrench, you can dodge a ball.' Life is a little like that scene in dodgeball, it throws up a range of challenges in your way and unless you have discipline and resilience, you are going to get hit by a wrench or a car. According to Jim Rohn, American entrepreneur, 'discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment' and I'd agree.

For all the gold in the world, you can't buy yourself more time. You can set up systems, employ staff and make a number of other life changes that allow you to learn more, have more of an impact and be able to use more of the time you have, but you can't buy more time. Time is our most precious commodity and only through a strong grasp of discipline will individuals be able to use it well.

*And now to number 3; the appreciation of ones health lived out through the knowledge and creation of a healthy diet and cultivation of a healthy mind and body.*

I really shouldn't need to explain this one but many experts have worked out that there is a clear link between a healthy body and mind and strong performance.

Eating right, regular exercise and meditation aren't just 'good for you', they help us to be excellent. This is because the regularity of these activities combined with the mental and physical struggle one endures participating in them builds a stronger, more disciplined and more resilient individual. As Buddha said, 'to keep the body in good health is a duty, otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear'.

*4 a defined goal or trajectory and the understanding of the steps that need to be taken in order to get there.*

And this time we turn to Einstein to sum it up in a pithy and eloquent way. 'If you want to have a happy life, tie it to a goal, not people or things'. Having a clear goal gives your life direction, if you don't know what you're doing – work it out! Or at least spend a significant amount of time thinking about it and taking as many opportunities as you can to challenge your views on it.

So these are four elements that I believe are needed to have the opportunity to be brilliant. But we know that most students at ANU... or most people in general... don't actually have these skills.

It is the lack of these skills that I believe to be the most critical knowledge gap known to man. Sure peace and war are important. But the inability of humans to achieve excellence in what ever it is they are doing is currently limiting our potential and leaving a wasteland of mediocrity with a few shining lights giving us hope that we, too, can be awesome.

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So why is it, that in an affluent country like Australia, full of endless possibilities and support for our brightest students, why is it that we see thousands of university students wasting away on social media platforms, in clubs, playing sport, reading, singing and dancing, instead of building their capacity to think and their knowledge. To be sure, I recognise that everyone should lead a balanced life, but why is there so much waste? Why is there so much time spent doing nothing, thinking nothing, feeling nothing...?

I spent an hour wandering through our university libraries, looking at the hundreds of computers switched on. Most of the screens I saw had various social media platforms open and I'm confident that students were not 'just having a break'. In the last three lectures I attended, most students had Facebook and an email application open while 'listening' to the lecture.... and that is the ones who showed up. The others were using their phones frequently while 'listening'.

We really do have no right to be at university, we are mostly here because of good fortune rather than hard work. Being born in the right place, being helped by the right people. Having that one teacher that said 'yes you can' or that uncle that made you realise what life would be like without trying. Yes, I acknowledge that many, many students work very hard. But I also acknowledge that there are many who only work hard enough to get by.

I'm not accusing these students of being 'bad people' or for wasting their time, but really... *I kind of am*. I'm accusing myself and many of my fellow students of being lazy, privileged, leeches on society. Ultimately we suck. But we do not have to, or... we didn't have to. At the end of the day, the way we behave is not entirely our fault, or is it?

Please don't take a dogmatic political view on this argument and say that because I think there are a bunch of students who are being lazy and not taking full advantage of their position, that I must 'hate' all students.

*I'm not a shock jock and you're not an idiot.*

However, we must acknowledge that the investment in our tertiary education is being wasted on thousands of students around the country who really should go to the Bahamas for a few years, work in a bar and come back when they are done fucking around and are ready to get serious.

It's a shame to see our first years, like some of the students I have met who are part of the Tuckwell Scholarship group, who genuinely want to learn and engage with subject matter at university, yet are surrounded by people like me who really didn't want to be here at all. Well, not after the first year and not anymore. I want to be able to think, I want to be able to learn but I don't want to be spoon fed by a bunch of academics who really don't care about teaching.

A huge apology to the few lecturers who really do love teaching, you're great.

*Here's a gold star.*

But in all honesty, thank you. It's the good academics that keep us here. I just wish we could see more debate between academics on ideas. Instead of having to learn different political theories, why not split students into groups and have them debating from the different perspectives on issues that impact us today. What would a socialist, a communist, a fascist etc think about the baby bonus, etc. Make it relevant, make it full of firey debate and for the sake of the Baby Jesus himself, can we try to make it interesting!

When reflecting upon myself, I realise that over the past seven years, I could have graduated with honors and completed a PhD while doing my other tasks provided I had a personal manager. This personal manager does not, will not and can not exist. There are simply not enough people that have their shit together to look after themselves, let alone hordes of undergraduate students. Let alone thinking about the costs of this. However, there are people who have the skills and discipline to manage themselves. Who don't need to sit around all weekend watching the West Wing for the fifth time because life just does not sound fun. People who get up every day with a desire to deliver 110% and get the most out of life.

Even looking at this course, I can see the way that my inability to achieve excellence stifles my potential to rigorously engage with something and get the most out of it.

One experience I have had which is perhaps closest to 'excellence' was during my initial creation of Raising Hope Education Foundation. During that time I had a pivotal moment in my life.

It was during 2010 and I had just been appointed as the Media Adviser to Dr Mike Kelly MP. He was a military man, a former barrister who had worked with the UN.

During that time I became quite passionate about stopping violence against women after a few female friends at ANU were sexually assaulted. White Ribbon Day was coming up and I wanted my boss to put out a serious press release, condemning violence against women and urging the regional communities in Eden-Monaro to combat it locally.

I was a little nervous, I really wanted this to sound right but was worried he was too much of a 'hetero-normative army guy' to really care about it. So I go up to him, this nervous kid-adviser, only 21, and ask him to read over it. Strange, I never really remember being very nervous at work but it meant a lot to me.

Then he hit me. Not physically, but with a powerful statement.

He read over the draft, looked back up at me and paused then said.

Ben, you know, in life, you will find a number of things piss you off. Some of those things you will describe as 'unacceptable', and you see, unacceptable is a pretty powerful word.... and if you describe something as unacceptable, *you have to do something about it.*

So after that, I did. I did something about the thing I found unacceptable and for a short period of time I was excellent. But it didn't last, and I honestly don't know if I can do anything to make it come back.

*So to conclude:*

The lack of connection to values, self-discipline, resilience, and self-care really does make up a serious knowledge gap that is killing our generation, or society and allowing us to accept mediocrity instead of aiming for excellence.

It is up to us to not accept this.

It is up to us to *do something about it.*

For as Dr Suess said, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."



### **Peer Review Reflection**

I believe the peer review process used in the Creating Knowledge is beneficial for students due to a number of reasons. This is the first course I have ever had to complete a peer review. During university I have seen a number of people helping friends to edit assessment in the day or two before it is due. The process ensured that everyone had completed at least done some work towards their portfolio, avoiding the situation of having no work done and little thought on what could be done in the last week. Forcing students to think about their major pieces of assessment in the weeks before they are due is a useful way to help improve the level of thought put into pieces of work. While some students engage with assessment early in the semester, many disengage and complete the bare minimum in the days before it is due. Individually, I found it interesting to look at the way other students had approached the task. This is specifically relevant for a course that has such vague assessment. While I know what I am doing, many others seem to constantly be confused and scared of the flexible nature of the assessment pieces and the need to be creative. It also provided the opportunity to compare and contrast, reconsider ideas and arguments. The most useful element of the peer review was that through evaluating another students work, we were able to begin to see what assessors look for when considering our own work. The key problem I see is that some students may see another's work and become confused about the way they have started their assessment. However, this is easily prevented by providing students with three different examples of CK Learning Portfolios. Overall I found it quite useful.

### **Weekly Tutorial Tickets**

#### **Week Three**

As I was not there, I thought it would be good for me to use this time to consider what preconceptions are and how they impact your view on knowledge. Perhaps the most innate part of thinking, preconceptions form the very basic background knowledge that we bring to any given situation. While uneducated, they serve as perhaps a basic survival mechanism. Someone who looks angry hits you, you then have a preconception that all angry people are going to hit you. Or probably more appropriately, you hear from someone that angry people like to hit others, and then presume to know that all angry people \*must\* be like this. As education and intellect increase, you gain a more nuanced understanding of these preconceptions and indeed, become aware of them. This is specifically important for high level interaction with others. The more history you have to develop preconceptions, the more likely you are to have a good understanding of a situation. However, preconceptions are quite dangerous as they don't give you a full understanding of a situation as while every angry person you meet in your life may hit you, you may then meet another angry person who will not and just needs someone to talk to. This is very important to be aware of when working with different cultures and individuals who you legitimately know little about, but have 'preconceptions' emerge that can cloud your judgement of someone. I

find this topic very fascinating and am always trying to remind myself how important it is to consider what preconceptions I am bringing to a situation. Prejudice and preconceptions can be the downfall of even the most intelligent or powerful person, when they are not aware of it.

#### Week Four

From what I recall, the disciplinary knowledge that I identified for the first tutorial after the lecture was from Sociology and was the basic notion that 'society' (whatever you believe it to be) exists as a force and has the ability to 'influence people'. Now, how that influence works, what makes it happen, who controls it etc is the subject of debate within sociology. However, the basic notion that there is something called society which we all belong to in either a small or large way, and that it influences us somewhat, is held as a basic truth.

I personally believe it is a truth that society exists as a force. I would argue that it is difficult to argue that there is not a level of influence that is contained within the makeup of societies through the broad tools of Government, the media and popular culture. I do recognise that this is easily contested and that as it can't be definitively proven like a maths equation, it can be construed as a 'belief'. Perhaps it is a belief, given I am believing that society has this control, when perhaps it is just individual actors acting separately, rather than a cohesive force.

The value set I bring to this knowledge. Hmm, an interesting question to be sure. I am interested to discuss with you tomorrow what this actually means a 'value set'. So many ideas.

On one hand, the knowledge value set I bring is an appreciation for the analytical and philosophical side to life. I imagine someone who has a more rigid or brutally realist value set might argue that this notion of society having influence on people is difficult to objectively measure and belongs in the humanities offices of some crack-pot professors who enjoy reading Foucault and Freud. So perhaps I value deep thinking that is not contingent upon data being available that can be scrutinised.

In terms of gaps in this knowledge, there are so many! I'd be interested to hear your perspective on this as a 'truth' and if it really is a knowledge, perhaps I have slightly missed the mark!

Week Five



*'Identity', Ben Duggan, 2014 (Canberra, Australia) Reproduction, digital mixed media. - This piece looks as the politics of identity for women and the icons four young women in Canberra identify with.*

Week Six

For my portfolio I have begun to look at the knowledge gap within education about how knowledge is communicated to those who don't want to receive it. It seems that the power structure within the knowledge of education is generally with liberal education academics, universities and governments. In its most broad form, power in education exists with the Government. Society maintains a control over the ability of governments to act through the regulation by the status quo or 'norms' that are developed in society over time. Government's do have the capacity to change and regulate what and how their populations are taught. While they are influenced by lobby groups, business and unions, they still maintain overall control. Then, universities have a significant role within the power structure, particularly in Australia, as they help to set standards and are involved in the shaping of the national curriculum. Then, academics and education professionals play a critical role as 'experts' in the field, wielding the power of knowledge to shut people out of the debate as 'uneducated' on the

subject of education. Education as a discipline exists in a bubble however it is heavily critiqued. Overall power still remains with the government despite individual and group ability to lobby for change.

#### Week Seven

Knowledge within education has been handed down primarily through text and education of individuals through universities. As new ideas develop and take shape within classrooms around the world, best practice develops and is shared through universities and text books. Education departments in governments play a critical role in spreading knowledge to existing educators while universities and individual academics are focused on building and initially sharing it. While modern technology such as twitter enables educators to share their learning online, this knowledge is still handed down through universities. Some knowledge is passed on from teacher to teacher or school to school in mentoring and collaborative arrangements. The lack of collaboration internationally means that the knowledge is still difficult to improve while being passed down every day. The key issue with this structure is that if individuals are exposed to poor educators, they may not have access to the best parts of the knowledge and thus pass down poor quality knowledge.

#### Week Eight

I must admit that I have struggled with answering this question. I am exploring the knowledge of how to share knowledge with those who don't want to receive it. This is focused on education. The difficulty is thinking about what protocols are required before this knowledge can be accessed. I guess the knowledge of this is generally located in an academic context. So you would have to be able to read and understand the knowledge in the way it is discussed academically through journal articles etc. You would be able to discuss it with individuals involved in education through conversation so perhaps requesting permission to discuss this and booking interviews would be protocol? There are some organisations too but the same protocol would be in place.

#### Week Nine

For this exercise I will be 'mapping' the knowledge of teaching to the knowledge of nursing.

#### Key similarities

- both knowledge bases come from centuries of practice and techniques that have been handed down while also relying upon new research, techniques and practices.
- both knowledges must be stored in an individual and rely on a general understanding of the application of the knowledge through a practical

approach. It is difficult for someone to know 'how to teach' or 'how to nurse' without practical experience and preparation.

- both knowledges are necessary to the continuing existence of life
- both knowledges involve intimate connection with another. Being able to teach relies on a connection with those who write texts. Being able to nurse relies on a connection with those who develop medicine.
- the knowledge of communication is important to both as is an understanding of emotions and human interaction.

Key differences:

- nursing requires a specific scientific knowledge of the practice while teaching relies on a more artistic approach that can be different for each individual practicing the knowledge.
- teaching as a knowledge is controlled and developed by the individual in line with procedures of government while nursing knowledge is heavily regulated and controlled.
- teaching knowledge is generally individual with small team connection while nursing knowledge is more team based with a smaller focus on the individual.

Week Ten

The conceptualisation of scientific knowledge has developed over time but has always remained significantly different to other forms of knowledge. Primary the difference is the assumption that all core scientific knowledge can or has been proven or is otherwise stated as a theory. This is very different to the knowledge of disciplines such as philosophy, politics or sociology that rely on opinion, observation and interpretation to develop individual theories expressed as concepts that may or may not be true, rather than concrete facts. While science is a creative exploration of life, it is essentially is a search for truths that can be proven rather than theories of existence and interaction. You could apply scientific framing to education methods in order to prove or disprove theories of teaching however it would be difficult to prove definitively if a method works or not. The variables of human interaction make it difficult to scientifically prove if something will always work or not. While rational choice theories can be applied to say if something is likely to occur given a certain set of circumstances, it can't always be right. The evidence you would need in an education related question would be a detailed analysis of what happened, an understanding of the setting and the students before participating in what ever it is and then an analysis of how things changed as a result of it. Various education academics try to use research techniques from science to prove their theories but trials are often poorly implemented. Randomised controlled trials can be used effectively but are difficult to develop and implement. Using this would improve the knowledge in the area by ensuring that 'good' educational techniques are used over poor.