

VCUG2001
REFLECTIVE WRITING
1 (15%)

Word limit (not including tutorial tickets) = 1500

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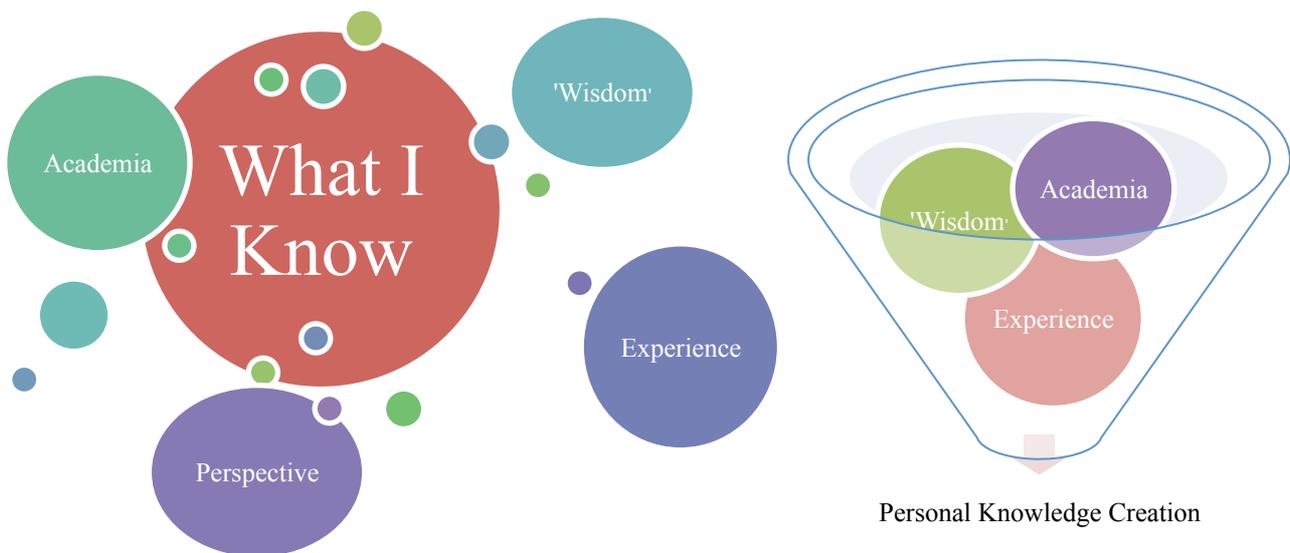
WEEK 1: Introduction to Creating Knowledge

REFLECTIONS

Panel

I saw knowledge as being disciplinary, academic, experience based and the ‘wisdom’ of others. I had never considered the process of knowledge creation, the relationship between types of knowledge or the value I place on specific knowledge sources. As embodied in Vervoorn’s analogy: *‘knowledge is more like a compost heap than a mountain’* there is dynamic interplay between knowledge sources. This concept changed my perception of knowledge and is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Perception of knowledge – previously and currently



Question

Is knowledge a representation of societal values?

This question challenges the subjective nature of knowledge creation. It reinforces the relationship between knowledge, the individuals that create knowledge and the societies and institutions that impact on them, as discussed by Young.

CONNECTIONS

As I learnt in SOCY1002, the relationship between individuals and society is the classic sociological conundrum – agency vs. structure. The idea of informal and formal knowledge

relates to ENV51001 where we analysed, in conjunction with ‘*Yolngu metaphors for learning*’ the impact of differing definitions of learning.

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

Identify a great thinker (or group of people) who have changed the way we see the world.

Karl Popper (1902 – 1994) fundamentally altered the way in which we perceive the world through his then controversial scientific philosophies. Popper challenged empirical scientific methodology by stating that no number of positive outcomes can confirm theories, instead scientific hypotheses and theories must be falsifiable. His aim was to distinguish science from pseudoscience using falsifiability and deductive reasoning. This created new knowledge as it changed scientific method. Theories can no longer be proven to be ‘true’, they have to be disproven.

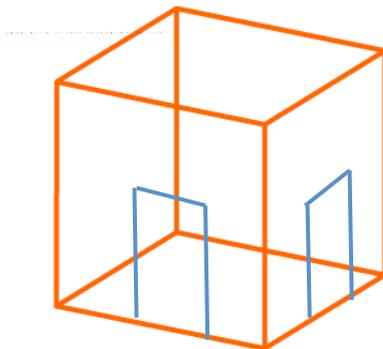
WEEK 2: Creativity

REFLECTIONS

Tutorial

In designing an activity to introduce our discipline we started with the concept: ‘there is no box’. But came to the conclusion creativity for multidisciplinary students was like a glass box with doors on each side –you can see your surroundings and venture out but have disciplined grounding to return to (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Glass box for creative thinking



Panel

Despite their differing disciplines, the panellists unanimously agreed that creativity is vital for solving complex problems. As demonstrated by our catchphrase '*Lean Mean Thinking Machines*' there is a relationship between creativity and critical thinking. Before this week creativity for me was limited to artistic expression and fiction writing. I had not recognised the importance of creativity in critical thinking, despite obviously solving problems by thinking in a creative manner.

Question

Is knowledge defined by structure, discipline and grounded in reality? Is creativity thus defined by breaking the rules?

The panellists spoke about the importance of working within a disciplinary field. However, quite unanimously all articulated the importance of multidisciplinary skills, action and perspectives to achieve creative and relevant research.

CONNECTIONS

Flint introduced the concept of 'silos' of knowledge. One parallel in regards to the communication of creativity was in '*The premature obituary of the book*' (W4). As quoted:

'Specialization leads to a lack of social understanding, to the division of human beings into ghettos of technicians and specialists' (2001, pp. 1)

This quote made me question the complex nature of creativity. Is it vital for critical thinking? Or does the segregation of knowledge impact on communication and our ability to relate?

TUTORIAL TICKET

Personally, these articles demonstrated the importance and power of creativity in expressing and developing knowledge. Interestingly as stated by Margaret Wertheim, her project overcomes discipline and subsequent knowledge barriers by 'thinking outside the box' so to speak in incorporating mathematics, marine biology, feminine handcrafts and environmentalism. More importantly, this creative project demonstrates the importance of community engagement and education in increasing one's knowledge. Having studied marine biology, creative arts and currently environmental sustainability, this project really

resonated with me through its celebration of diversity, its value of individualism and its holistic approach. As shown with Margaret's proposed 'play tanks', and kindergarten for grownups engagement and education should be taught creatively – which I agree with.

I found McIntyre's argument that social and cultural structures dictate individual creativity quite fascinating. In SOCY1002 last semester, I started to analyse society through a sociological lenses and this article demonstrates the classic sociological conundrum – agency or structure. Idealistically I tend to believe that as individuals our creativity is intrinsically an expression of our autonomy. However, in reality, and after studying SOCY1002 I recognise the impact that structure and society have on our sense of self and thus creativity.

WEEK 3: Great Critical Thinkers

REFLECTIONS

Panel

Critical thinking as an assessment criterion makes me doubt my writing, without giving much thought to what it means. However, this panel on Marx and Wollstonecraft forced me to '*think about thinking.*' As stated in the Q&A knowledge creation is not elitist but does point towards education – so perhaps education is an assumed foundation for critical thinking and the subsequent knowledge creation. Is a creative thinker a critical thinker? Or purely someone who challenges accepted beliefs? However, if critical thinkers are defined as challenging preconceptions, I think we all fit into this category in some manner.

Question

Is the longevity of relevance shaped by critical thinking or by framing issues that resonate with humanity over time?

Woolcoot and Greig discussed the importance of creative thinkers to be opportunistic. As demonstrated with the longevity of Feminist and Marxist ideology, these concepts were communicated effectively and framed so they evoked a response.

CONNECTIONS

Q&A focused on effective communication and this directly relates to my previous course science communication (SCOM1001). As stated in the panel: '*nothing we can write is idiot*

proof, and personally I feel that the subjectivity of interpretation is the unfortunate reality impinging on scientific concepts in the public sphere.

WEEK 4: Ways of Writing Human

REFLECTIONS

Tutorial

I believe that literature is a major medium for self-expression and for relating to shared experiences, as demonstrated in this tutorial. However, I found that ways of writing human is harder than I first thought. Expressing my self through poetry was challenging and my haiku did not do me justice.

Panel

Q&A raised the importance of ways of writing human as giving an insight into cultural ways of seeing. Despite the focus of the panel being Dostoyevsky, Maugham and Australian political cartoons, the questions emphasised the necessity of literature for enhancing cultural understanding.

Question

Literature is arguably the means for which humanity questions and responds - does the definition impact on what we see as important?

Discussion was centred on the importance of literature in humanities to make sense of experiences. However, this focus made me question the definition of literature and the value placed on scientific insights into humanity.

CONNECTIONS

Quite unanimously, we came to the consensus that 'classics' like Marx and Wollstonecraft (W3) remain relevant as they are not restricted within a time space context.

I have studied art at a tertiary level and thus Pope's emphasis on visual forms of expression resonated with me. As illustrated in Figure 3, my Year 12 sculpture assignment, the connection between mother and child can be expressed using sculpture. Although I recognise the subjective nature of sculpture, I believe that visual expression is a powerful means of creating knowledge.

Figure 3: Sculpture



TUTORIAL TICKET

In what ways are they (literature and cartoons) effective?

As discussed quite passionately in Llosa's *The premature obituary of the book: Why literature*, literature is the most powerful form of self-expression. Literature and the process of reading a book can unite people despite time and place and gives a remarkable insight into

human nature and the realities of the world. You can read to experience the unknown or you can read to escape – and in the process you learn.

The medium used to express knowledge is highly contextualised. I think that both cartoons and literature are effective means of producing knowledge, but they produce very different outcomes. I feel that we all learn more if we receive information through different means – whether it is visual, audio, text or practically.

Do writers write to achieve consensus/to make things out of words/to make sense of the world?

I think that writers obviously write for a variety of reasons – many do shape their work around understanding the world or giving an insight into humanity. I don't believe that they write to achieve consensus. And sometimes you don't know why it was written – it is just what the reader takes from the work that conveys knowledge.

What enables a work to be labelled 'a classic'?

I believe that a work becomes a classic when it can be removed from its place in time and space and still have a resounding effect on those that read it. The story, themes, issues and characters are timeless and represent the essence of human life. Classics are such because we as a society continue to relate to them.

WEEK 5: Science Humanities Gap

REFLECTIONS

Tutorial

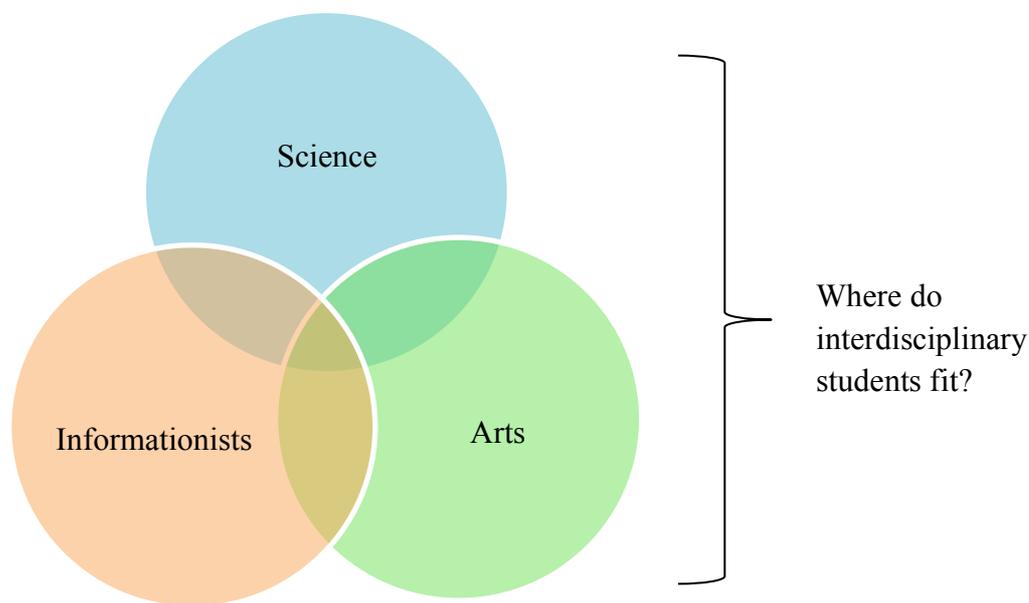
Although the topic was on the perceived gap, it was the intricacies of the debate – the value of depth over breadth that impacted on me the most. One of the major questions that arose from the discussion for me was: if we value depth and specialisation over breadth, how is diversity incorporated and critical thinking facilitated? I came out of the tutorial wondering the value of the skills I am learning as a BISS student.

Panel

Byrne proposed a new category of cultures - 'informationists' (see Figure 4). I agree that we access information differently and therefore have the ability to create new knowledge.

However, this category classifies a generation of arts and science students without recognising multidiscipline students. As raised in Q&A knowledge in universities is created in specialised 'silos' but real life action depends on interdisciplinary integration. As raised by a classmate, students are increasingly overcoming the gap, and therefore could be seen as a generational concept.

Figure 4: A 'New Culture'



Question

How relevant is humanities knowledge if there is a prolonged gap between contextualised research and publication?

Makkai discussed communication and dissemination and emphasised the long timeframes for research publication. Thus, I was fascinated by the relevance of information if there is a time lag in the studies and publication of knowledge.

CONNECTIONS

This week's debate on the hypothetical existence of a gap reinforced the concept of 'insiders and outsiders' from SOCY1002. This mentality maintains the gap whilst simultaneously shaping our identity as a scientist, historian or doctor as we are "*seeing ourselves as we think others see us*" (Prosser, 2011).

TUTORIAL TICKET

Is there a real divide, and what is the nature of this divide if it exists?

Yes. As our society functions on disciplined based knowledge, humanities and science focus on different methods of research and emphasise different social values and this means that a divide does exist. I feel that the nature of this divide is socially constructed and maintained as emphasis is on learning and researching within a disciplined box. Although multidisciplinary is becoming increasingly popular, one must still have and recognise their box in order to step out of it and consciously incorporate external knowledge into their research or education. As a BISS student I agreed with Gould's 'closing statement that we should incorporate and utilise the strengths of humanities and science. I think that we all should learn more widely in order to understand the complexities of the modern world.

What may be the practical implications for knowledge due to the divide?

Practically, the divide means that particular knowledge and information is created and used within these disciplines. This has ramifications for policy, societal function, education and knowledge in general as more often than not proposed solutions do not recognise the connections between humanities, science and society. On a communication level, the science-humanities gap often fuels misinformation and misunderstanding of the disciplines. This quite ironically creates and maintains the gap itself.

What kind of actions and motives may help to facilitate such a divide and what can be gained or lost due to the division?

By addressing knowledge and information in such a segregated manner, it allows greater depth of research as each field is specialised. However, as mentioned above this depth over breadth means that individuals are specialised in one area and are not trained to see connections and cross communicate. This emphasis, to a certain extent, also limits what each discipline can offer and achieve. I also feel that modern society values specialisation and discipline more than holism and interdisciplinary action.

WEEK 6: Pacific Ways of Knowing

REFLECTIONS

Tutorial

This week practically demonstrated Vervoorn's statement (W1): *'knowledge begins with the perceptions and experience of the individual'*. Discussion was not grounded in the readings and thus perceptions and opinions were articulated from ignorance. This experience made me question if we are able to create knowledge and increase understanding in an objective manner. Would discussion benefit from acknowledging one's bias and ignorance?

Panel

This first-hand knowledge enabled me to learn about cultural ways of knowing. However, this panel still played on my ignorance – shocked to find that I could not name more than two Pacific countries.

Q&A altered how I perceived relations between Pacific Islanders and western culture. I assumed that colonialism and Christianity are inherently bad for culture. However, as stated by Latai that mentality underestimates the active role that Samoan culture has in the integration of western knowledge.

The importance of communal thinking and its potential benefits for western society resonated with me as an environmental student. Teaiwa categorised the Carbon tax debate as individualistic thinking shaping inaction. If we embrace the saying *'I is we always'* and think collectively I believe that western society could implement long term change.

Question

Communal thinking is the basis for Samoan culture; however with the integration of other ways of thinking do tensions arise between communal thinking and individual attitudes?

As discussed by Latai, Samoan culture questioned, contested and adapted aspects of other cultures to make them uniquely their own. This raised the question of balance and harmonisation.

CONNECTIONS

The impact of perceptions, experiences and ignorance on the value of knowledge resonated this week. Although I have travelled extensively (see Figure 5), I have not travelled to the

Pacific Islands. I had not considered the subconscious value I placed on specific ways of knowing. I now realise that what I know is shaped by my experiences and perceptions.

Figure 5: Visited Countries



TUTORIAL TICKET

Wendt's article, *'Tatauing of the Post-Colonial Body'* raised questions about the oppressive and belittling nature of westernised domination and culture supremacy. In comparing these articles to my current studies of IR theory and western ideology in POLS1005 the realities of these theories are seen quite clearly. For me it is the oppressive, systematic classification of culture and society within a westernised view that obviously impacts on tradition and cultural preservation for Pacific islanders. As stated by Wendt: *'...the Nambas...performed with only penis sheaths and elaborate body decoration and considered themselves fully clothed...the audience laughed at them for being 'naked savages'*. This feeling of shame and belittling of culture and values is reiterated in *'Our Sea of Islands'*. How they are perceived, impacts directly on how they perceive themselves. Western views and traditions have negatively impacted on the sense of self and individual empowerment through this classification process. However, these articles also give an insight into the strength of culture, societal structures, family, tradition and individual resolve to maintain and preserve their cultural identity. On a personal level, the importance of family, relationships and the continuation of

these connections despite international barriers and distance is inspiring and empowering. I feel that the values fostered in these communal cultures that value group unity over individualism and that the perception of an individual is in terms of groups and relationships is vital in increasing tolerance and understanding as knowledge processed in regards to people. The means, in which knowledge is transmitted, through song, dance and tatauing, simultaneously creates knowledge and heightens culture and social norms despite western influence.

References:

Prosser, B., 2011, Self and Society lecture (SOCY1002), 2/05/2011, Australian National University.

Llosa, M.V., 2001, 'The premature obituary of the book: why literature?', *The New Republic* online, accessed 09/08/2011, <<http://crab.rutgers.edu/~goertzel/vargasllosa.htm>>