

Running head: RE-KNOWING PROJECT

Re-Knowing Project: Reframing Thinking and Understanding of Ways of Knowing

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Introduction

Looking back at my journey through the Ways of Knowing class I can truly say that I have changed. I probably have not changed drastically but I have most definitely grown. I find myself now more aware about and tolerant towards different ways of knowing. For a long time I tried to understand what the term “ways of knowing” meant. While learning that it was the way people came to know I could not decide what my way of knowing was. I come to know from everything and everybody around me. Due to the fact that I was fortunate to live in different countries and to study in different systems, I had plenty of opportunities to experience adjusting to the new ways of thinking and doing according to the place I was in. I feel because of that I had a broader view about ways of knowing to begin with. That is why I cannot say this class reframed my thinking cardinally but at the same time reframing occurred while it multiplied my ways of knowing. While my framed thinking was quite broad, I was open to different ways without really knowing what those ways were. In this way I have learned various ways of knowing that I now can utilize in my personal and professional activities.

Looking back at my Essay 1, I notice that I identified wisdom as a source of knowledge about the benefits of assistive technology for students with disabilities. At that time all I knew was scientific research and/or that other way when you just know. I think about a situation when you give a child with expressive language difficulties a communication device that enables him/her to talk. What empirical research or what else do you really need to prove the benefit of that device besides the fact that a child talks? That is what I consider the logical way to come to know through experience and wisdom. Although I still think that no empirical/scientific research is needed in such situation (because you can obviously observe the results), I now consider other ways to conduct/report such case. You can employ other ways of knowing/thinking (e.g., narrative inquiry, practitioner inquiry, self-study, etc.) to demonstrate how you know that a

communication device is beneficial. Through readings, individual writing assignments as well as collaborative projects in this class I explored new ways to learn and demonstrate the knowledge and found most of them appropriate for my discipline.

Reaching Reframed Thinking and Understanding

Readings and Essays

In this section I want to reflect on those readings and reflective essays throughout the class that touched me and made me look at the world, people, my discipline, and myself differently.

Epistemological models. Hofner and Pincher's article about different epistemological models was very challenging for me to understand. I honestly spent the whole week reading and re-reading it to get to the point. I do not regret spending all that time. The main thing it has taught me is that people are different based on where they are in the epistemological development. In addition, we can be at different stages based on the situation, area of expertise, or simply a good or a bad day. Due to my background I am struggling to get away from dualism. All my life I was taught to accept things as black and white. Since I am aware now that there are other stages that I yet have to reach, I reflect on my development as a person, a teacher, and assistive technology specialist from the point of view of where I am on the epistemological ladder. I believe that helps me to reflect deeper than I could ever before allowing for further development. I have noticed that when I meet challenges on my way I tend to go back to dualism just because it seems so much easier to me. This fact truly fascinates me. After reading this article and reflecting on it I know that not all people are the same including my students and with the knowledge about epistemological stages I can approach them in a better way.

Empirical research and cultural influences. I was relieved after reading Kincheloe's article. Since the first day of class, I felt really tight about my way of knowing because it was so

different from everybody else's. I even felt that something was wrong with me. After reading about critical constructivism I realized that the fact that I came from a different background, culture was my "pearl", something that only I had in the whole class and I should cherish that. I guess I knew that all along but I felt safer after reading the article.

Descartes felt familiar and close to me. I read him before and always knew research from the scientific perspective. I believe I have learned even more while trying to compare Descartes and Kincheloe. Matching one way of thinking against the other made me think about the advantages of each of them. I can see that some aspects of my discipline can benefit from breaking them up and reasoning through them while others have to be looked at within the contest.

Feminist way of knowing. Despite some painful experience, some of my classmates really made me believe that feminist way of knowing is not just against the men (the only way I knew feminism before). Rather it is about making women powerful individuals. I am still not comfortable discussing this topic but I now look at feminists differently appreciating their strength and pride in themselves. This way I can truly say that I was able to challenge my paradigm. My area of interest lies in special education, the area originally and always empowered by women. I really do not see any questions that female need answering in my discipline that would make it feminist. However, just like any other field, assistive technology implementation area can benefit from gender studies (gender, not feminist).

Narrative inquiries. Essay 5 made me realize that narrative description is probably more difficult for me to utilize than a pure scientific one. I agree that narratives give more information because they provide context. However, I find it very important to remember that employing narrative inquiry is much more than just writing a story. Bruner's work opened my eyes to some aspects of narratives like the forms recruiting the reader's imagination that I have never thought

about before. So if the reader “writes” his/her own virtual text while reading the narrative, how is it possible to make sure they receive the information you are trying to narrate? If our understanding depends on who we are and where we come from can a narrative be misinterpreted? If so, will the meaning of it be diminished? After getting acquainted with this way of knowing I am interested in learning more about it.

Internet way of knowing. I was truly amazed and fascinated with the Popular Culture/Media as a Way of Knowing by Weber and Mitchell website. I was struck with their website design. World Wide Web is becoming more and more utilized way of knowing not only by professionals but also by children. That particular website made me realize that not only it is important to think about accountability of what you put on the website (content) but also about how to organize it so people stay there longer than statistical 30 seconds and have a chance to get to your content. It is even more important to consider the “right” design for children’s websites. With these new ideas I am looking forward to examining several children’s websites to study their design and its impact. More than that, my new way of knowing goes beyond Internet into software and computer games for children including those with disabilities.

Projects and Activities

I explored several other ways of knowing through various class projects and activities.

Talk show. This assignment was quite challenging because it was hard for me to think of the questions that would have the answers (if I have questions for Descartes he is probably the only one who can answer them). What I found interesting was how each group approached this assignment. Our use of the Jerry Springer’s show and innovative commercials demonstrated yet another way of knowing through creativity. Talking to other groups revealed the level of satisfaction with that assignment. It made me think about how creativity can make any project

more exciting and fulfilling. It is amazing how I always used creativity while teaching first graders but never thought about it for my own studies and research.

Film collaborative. It is interesting to notice that I could not understand the purpose of this project right until we started discussing and giving feedback to each other within the group. When I first read the assignment description, I thought, “I don’t understand why we do this. How many different opinions can there be about the movie “I Am Sam?”” Needless to say, I was stunned with how diverse all the perspectives were. Only at that point I understood how shallow my way of thinking was and how unaware I was of different ways of knowing. It was the first time in this class when I truly challenged my own way of knowing. Then, during other presentations I noticed that some people talked about elements I never thought about watching this or that movie. I watched the “Birdcage” last weekend. Although I saw it hundreds times before, it was just like a new movie for me this time after our class discussion. I also think that the way each group presented their film collaborative demonstrated how many different ways of thinking and knowing there are.

Art as a way of knowing. I did not expect it but the activity in class when we were walking around and looking at different pieces of art changed my way of knowing. Just like with the film collaborative I never imagined that people might see different things looking at the same picture. I was truly surprised to find out that a Caucasian girl from Russia and an African-American woman from USA pay attention to different aspects/elements of the picture. Once again this activity proved how our way of knowing depended on our culture and backgrounds. Once again it has made me think that when people do something I do not understand it is not because they do something wrong but because they are coming from a different paradigm of knowing.

Knowing paper. I have learned a great deal from the knowing paper project. Not only I discovered self-study as a way of knowing that I now seriously consider for various projects but I collaborated with Deanna and learned a lot through cooperation process as well. The main focus of this project for us was to identify how our different ways of knowing shaped out interests in professional life and research. It was not a surprise to find out that both of us chose something we truly cared about because of our past experiences as our current dissertation topics/area of concentrations. This project allowed me to understand how my childhood and practices in Russia guided me towards learning something new, something I could not learn back at home. This project did not change my way of knowing. However, it helped me to refine and explain to myself what areas I wanted to pursue. Let me return to the idea about how collaboration enriched me in this project later in the paper.

These are the main readings, written assignments, and projects that influenced my learning. However, I truly believe that it is the combination of all of them that made the greatest impact. It was quite interesting to feel that my perception of this or that topic could change long after we finished discussing it just because I learned something new that added or shifted my understanding of the previous topic. That way I was still hostile of feminist way of knowing even after reading about it and discussing it in class until several weeks later the same topic was raised again during the film collaborative and I suddenly looked at it differently. Just like in putting the puzzle together, adding each piece made something click in my brain expanding and shifting my treasured paradigms even further.

Collaboration in the Process of Reframing My Thinking

All my life people around me shaped my thinking. My knowing as a person came from my family. My knowing as a teacher came from co-teaching with other teachers. My knowing as a researcher comes from people I currently work with. I believe that makes me more successful

than I could ever be without cooperation. After learning about different ways of knowing I am looking into collaborating with even more people just because I do not want to be limited to only certain ways of knowing. I believe in a great power of collaboration. So in this class I enjoyed and made use of all opportunities to work in partnerships. I tried to participate in each project as much as I could and that gave me an opportunity to learn not only from different people's perspectives but also from the collaborative process itself. In all projects the role of critical friends was significant. In knowing project Deanna and I challenged each other's self-study to ensure the presence of alternative ways. Critical friends in other projects truly prevented me from being overcritical and judgmental. I learned to be open from some of them and to be more scientific, more qualitative, or more creative from others. In all cases I was grateful to have somebody to share my ideas with. I can now say that personally I learn more from discussing and sometimes even arguing the content than from just reading and reflecting.

My New Way of Knowing

What I have at the end is the knowledge of multifaceted aspects of knowing. After this class I cannot think like Descartes that there is only one way of knowing. I am now looking forward to employing all the best qualities of different ways of knowing in my personal and professional development. Right away I started planning a self-study and a practitioner inquiry study that I did not know about before. Consciously and subconsciously through readings and projects I have formulated several ideas that I am hoping to execute.

We can enrich our disciplines by utilizing different ways of knowing. Such notion lines up nicely with the research basics. You choose a method based on the question you want to be answered. In some cases based on the question and the context it is more beneficial to go by Descartes, break every down, and reason through it. In other cases you really need to employ narrative inquiry to describe the context because only that way it will be beneficial for your

audience. A lot of questions in my discipline look at the interrelations between the technology and cultural factors. When studying those aspects of assistive technology it would be helpful to refer to Kincheloe’s work. Regardless of what you study, the area of assistive technology is highly collaborative. Collaboration exists on all levels of work in this area.

Overall, there are different sources of knowledge (“Fish Is Fish”) and the picture is never complete but if you look at it from different perspectives you have more puzzle pieces together than if you accept only one way of knowing. And just like in Howard’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, the more tools you use, the more people will be able to benefit from it. I think that now I am ready for a journey as a researcher because I am equipped not only with different tools/ways of knowing I currently aware of but now I also know that even more of them exist. The more you know, the less you know. This journey will never be boring if I keep exploring and making use of different ways of knowing. Who knows maybe I will be able to discover some way of knowing never applied to the area of assistive and instructional technology for students with learning disabilities. Either way I should and will try to enjoy all the different ways.

