The Epistemology of What We Do and How to Explain it to Funders, Clients and Your Relatives

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IIQM Webinar, November 2013
slide rules

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In the public version of the slides on the IIQM website, a couple of images used in the original presentation have been deleted.
A lot of this talk comes out of *The Lively Science*, written for a general audience.

But this webinar is upgraded for fellow professionals in this thing we do.

Let’s start with examples from my checkered past of how different this science can look.
GEORGE RAFT
ANN SHERIDAN
IDA LUPINO
HUMPHREY BOGART

THEY DRIVE BY NIGHT

GALE PAGE
ALAN HALE
ROSCOE KARNS

DIRECTED BY RAUL WALSH

PRESENTED BY WARNER BROS.
Projects vary all over the place and yet they move in similar ways and draw on similar ideas that are different from the "received view".

The context of work changes. So does scope and scale. But the work doesn’t.

And the questions that funders, clients and my relatives ask about them haven’t changed since I first used the approach in the 1960s.
The questions my behavioral/social science colleagues ask about it haven’t changed much either.

What it is? Is it X?

where X = anthropology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, qualitative, geisteswissenschaft, idiographic, phenomenology.

For sure X ≠ science.

Never mind investigative journalism, intelligence analysis, history, organizational development, etc.

Foucault in living black and white.
What are those similarities among all those projects? The answer is, they all use the same way of learning and representing the results.

The similarities are about a **pragmatic epistemology**, not about theory or method or data.
Here’s a second thing those pictures share. The same images of work in the opening slides also make disciplines disappear.
Not much interesting right now is going on in the center of any traditional discipline.

It’s a postdisciplinary world out there.
So what do we do about the disciplinary boundaries cemented into universities, professional organizations, funding sources, etc.

That’s the second problem I like to work on. Call it a transdisciplinary epistemology.

Because interdisciplinary is still about discipline, and the practical epistemology is not.
A Pragmatic Transdisciplinary Epistemology?!?

It’s a different kind of science based on evidence organized by logic in a way capable of challenge based on other evidence, like any science.

The phenomena are what make it different intersubjective self-referential dynamic emergent. We have met the phenomenon and it is us.
Brentano and Dilthey
Not your grandfather’s human social science

- First person psychology
- Intentionality--beliefs, desires, emotions, purposes
- Lived experience
- History

Other traditions

*a different kind of phenomenon*
*a different kind of science*
Here’s a Try At It
With Application Built In

- Rich Points --> POV contrast is the figure
- ...in terms of intentionality
- ....derived from lived experience
- ......which we can learn dynamically
- ........and translate on universal grounds
- ............and put to use --> Leverage Points
- ................with human universals as the ground to the figure all along the way

That would be an epistemology that works for the different projects I showed in the first few slides
Pope Benedict’s “Culture of the Encounter”
intentionality and lived experience, but intersubjective rational reconstruction instead of objective claims

Habermas plus Toulmin
The “Learn Dynamically” Part

- Rich points and IRA logic and context/meaning questions and nonlinear dynamic systems
- Interesting that people love rich points, get IRA, but have more trouble with C/M questions
- Adjustable for time, depth and breadth
- Know when to hold ‘em, etc.
Translating the Differences

- Longtime used as metaphor for ethnography but seldom examined
- SLC, TLC, domestication and foreignization
- The universal base: Etic/emic and psychic unity/relativism
- Levels of context
- Why I get fired--Bakhtin and Flack
But it’s not all differences
Maybe not even mostly differences
What about the psychic unity part
What about human universals
What about a theory of what it means to be human?
Redfield’s mantra

http://www.pangeaday.org/filmDetail.php?id=18

It might be, in our poststructural world, that the best way to teach intercultural communication would be to teach human universals.
The **Leverage** Part?

- Donella Meadows, 1997
- *Limits to Growth*
- Turning a freighter
- “A small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything.”
- **Leverage points**
Are You an Applied/Engaged/Public/Participatory/Action Type???

- The fundamental application
- Naive realism vs. perspective-taking
- The problem is, structure follows strategy
- The bigger problem is, people who ask for innovation usually don’t want it
- Clear “bottom line” indicators together with “aligned interests”
Here’s The Try At It
In Hindsight

• Rich Points --> **POV contrast** is the **figure**

• ...in terms of **intentionality**

• ....derived from **lived experience**

• ......which we can **learn dynamically**

• ......which we can **learn dynamically**

• ........and **translate on universal grounds**

• ..............and put to **use** --> **Leverage Points**

• ..............and put to **use** --> **Leverage Points**

• ................with **human universals** as the ground to the figure all along the way
Knowledge and Human Interests

- Researcher as subject, research as human social world
- Tales of drugworld and waterworld
- The danger: “Can we talk about me for awhile?”
- One way or another, the researcher and the research are part of the data
Spinning in his grave

- Non-monotonic but logical?
- Non-experimental but empirical?
- Non-quantitative but mathematical?
- Non-materialistic but understandable?
- Non-linear but formalizable?
- Bollocks!!!
Practical Transdisciplinary Epistemology?
Human social science is just catching up with the concept. It isn’t about playing a certain kind of music. It’s about playing any kind of music in a certain way. That “certain way” is what a practical transdisciplinary epistemology is about.