Academic Knowledge and Learning: What does your lecturer think you know already?
Centre for Teaching and Learning
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Write down what you think these words mean:

**Perspective** ____________________________________________

**Theory** ________________________________________________

**Critique** ______________________________________________

What is Academic Knowledge?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal knowledge</th>
<th>Academic/Scientific Knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge that people use to make sense of their daily lives</td>
<td>Knowledge that scholars, experts or scientists create to understand the world, explain how things work, and suggest how they can be improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So many people are being bullied at work in this country! And it’s a really serious problem because it causes misery for victims and headaches for the organisation. The audience does not generally expect proof for claims made Belongs to everybody Information is often general rather than specific or detailed Language is informal or conversational</td>
<td>Workplace bullying is recognised as a major concern among researchers internationally (Salin, 2008) and has been identified as a widespread problem in New Zealand. In one study, O’Driscoll et al. (2011) surveyed over 1700 employees of 36 organisations in New Zealand. Nearly 18% of these employees reported being bullied at work Work in education is often general rather than specific or detailed or detailed or detailed Proof/evidence is required when a claim is made Belongs to the researchers/organisations Information is specific, detailed, and expressed formally and objectively</td>
</tr>
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When is a marker likely to allocate higher marks for an assignment?

Good mood?  Bad mood?
(Townsend, Kek, & Tuck, 1989)

Generation of academic knowledge

Primary research
Researchers collect data, analyse it and reach conclusions

They **publish** their research in
- scholarly journals
- books

Example:

Generation of academic knowledge

- Research contributes to **theoretical knowledge** on a topic

*Example:*

*Contributes to understanding of workplace bullying – some aspect(s) of how it occurs, why it occurs and what can be done about it*

- Theory develops as new evidence emerges from research
Relationship between theory and research

• Theory develops as new evidence emerges from research

\[ \text{Theory} \rightarrow \text{Research} \rightarrow \text{Theory} \]

• Researchers review and build on previous knowledge to develop new knowledge in a field

There are multiple theoretical perspectives in any topic area

- Educational strategy
- Organisational structure
- Change management
- Emotional development
- Leadership
- Internationalisation
- Stress
- Culture

• Similar perspectives and competing perspectives
• Each has its strengths and limitations

Underlying any perspective is a definition...

Definitions: The foundations of different perspectives

**Categoryisation: What is it?**
An axe is a tool which is used for chopping wood.

**Components/attributes/features**

**Categoryisation: What is it?**
An axe is a weapon which is used for killing people.

**Components/attributes/features**

Academic definitions:
Name of concept + Categoryisation + Components/Attributes/Features

Why are definitions so important?

• They are the lens through which you view the concept
• They form the foundation for your discussion of topics in your assignments
• They form the foundation for theoretical models

Compare these two understandings of aggression:

- Aggression is a natural behaviour. It is triggered by threats from others in the environment.
- Aggression is a learned behaviour. It is learned by observing this behaviour rewarded in others in the environment.

They would require different approaches to finding solutions

- Identify sources of threats in the environment and minimise them.
- Identify situations in which aggressive behaviour is rewarded and minimise them.

What if we view aggression as a combination of individual and environmental factors?

![Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory](image-url)
A theoretical framework for aggression might explain:
- What is it? (Definition)
- How does it occur?
- When does it occur?
- Where does it occur?
- Why does it occur?

Can help practitioners like teachers to:
- Recognise the signs
- Predict when it’s likely to occur
- Explain why it has occurred in a particular situation

So that they will be better equipped to:
- Manage the situation when it does occur
- Prevent it from occurring in the future

Critical use of theory in academic study

As a postgraduate student you will be expected to:
- define the concepts you are discussing or researching
  - beginning of essays/reports/literature reviews
- acknowledge that there are different perspectives/views of the concepts you are discussing or researching
- compare these perspectives
- evaluate these perspectives in terms of specific contexts
  - strengths and limitations in terms of your research topic or your area of practice

Working with theory and research in assignments

- Applying the theory and research on a topic to analyse organisations and situations
- Critiquing the theory and research available on the topic

We’ll be using Hofstede’s (1980) model of cultural variance as an example of what this means

Identifying the elements can help you understand and use definitions

Hofstede (1980) defined culture as follows: “Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one human group from another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values” (p. 25).

1. Name of concept – followed by verb (is/can be defined as/is defined as)
2. Categorisation – crucial element of definition
3. Features – components/characteristics

Geert Hofstede’s IBM study (1967-1973)

Definition of culture: “Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one human group from another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values” (1980, p. 25).

Examined how values in the workplace are influenced by culture

- Different value systems
- Consequences in workplace

Published his research in a book: Cultures and organizations: National differences in work-related values (1980)

Seminal text – very important or key text

Geert Hofstede’s IBM study (1967-1973)

Aim: To identify universal dimensions of culture that differ among countries

Aspects of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures

Method: How did he do it?

Analysed data from a survey of middle managers in an international corporation (IBM) with sites in 66 countries

What did he find?

Identified four dimensions in original study (1980)
- individualism versus collectivism
- power distance
- femininity versus masculinity
- uncertainty avoidance

Added - long term vs short-term orientation (1991)
Added - indulgence versus restraint (2010)
**Hofstede's model of national cultural differences**

*Six cultural dimensions:*

- Individualism versus collectivism
- Power distance
- Femininity versus masculinity
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Long term versus short-term orientation
- Indulgence versus restraint

Hofstede's framework can be used to predict how and why people behave as they do (Robock & Simmonds, 1989).

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**Theoretical models are applicable to research in multiple contexts**

**Power Distance**
The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally

*How could teachers/social workers/managers (business) use this information?*

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**Researchers use and adapt theoretical models for research in different contexts**

- Use of theoretical model unchanged
- Test the model in a study
- Use the model to explain something
- Use of adapted form of model
- Rejection of model or aspects of model
- Presentation of alternative model

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**What are you expected to do with theory and research in your assignments?**

- Apply theory and research from your readings to analyse organisations and real life situations
  - to develop an argument on a specific issue
  - to analyse a case

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**Consider the following case...**

Michael accepts an assignment to teach in a rural school in a developing country overseas. When he begins his first class he finds that the students are chatting to each other as he speaks and don't appear to be paying attention to him. After a while he's had enough. He calls out “Excuse me class!” and tells them that he finds their behaviour rude and unacceptable. The students stare at him in astonishment, clearly not understanding his objection. Michael later finds that during tests the students' eyes wander to the efforts of others. Local teachers in the school do not object to this behaviour which Michael considers to be cheating.

**...in the light of Hofstede's theory**

Individualism versus collectivism: Individualistic cultures emphasise individual achievement and self-sufficiency. Collective cultures place more value on the co-operative effort of the group in reaching a goal and they emphasise group loyalty and harmony among group members.

*How would Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism explain the difference in expectations shown in the case?*
Applying the theory and research to analyse cases or situations

Example: Main idea – topic sentence

One possible explanation for these different expectations regarding appropriate student behaviour is that Michael comes from an individualistic culture while the culture of his pupils and the local teachers is collective in nature. Hofstede (2001) characterises individualistic cultures as those that emphasise individual achievement and self-sufficiency while collective cultures value group loyalty, co-operation and harmony among group members. Brislin, Worthley and Macnab (2006) argue that when students from collectivist cultures talk to each other during the teaching process, they are fulfilling their obligation to share their knowledge with other members of the student group in a co-operative effort to understand the material being presented by the teacher. Likewise, sharing information during exams fits their cultural expectation of group cooperation in attaining goals and the maintenance of good relations amongst members of the group. In their survey of schools in... Beaton and Brajinsky (2003) found that co-operative effort was valued...

Where does my own opinion fit in?

- You will be viewing the familiar world through the lens of theory and research
- You need to demonstrate that your opinion on an issue is sound by referring to evidence
- Support your opinion by referring to theoretical concepts and evidence from research

What are you expected to do with theory and research in your assignments?

- Apply the theory and research to analyse organisations or situations
  - to develop an argument on a specific issue
  - to analyse a case
- Critique the theory and research on a topic
  - critique is central to academic writing

Critiquing research

Involves examination of both usefulness and limitations

Examine the research method:

Example:

- Sample based on a single multinational organisation
- Subjects predominantly middle class males

Critiquing research

Involves examination of both usefulness and limitations

Examine the researcher’s assumptions:

Example:

- Does culture systematically cause consequences?
- Can culture be measured?
- What about sub-cultures?
- Are cultures static?

Table 1: Hofstede’s Five Cultural Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD</th>
<th>IND</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>UAI</th>
<th>LTO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Is this an accurate reflection of New Zealand society?
Comparing perspectives on a concept

Combination of cultures unique to individuals:

Straub et al. (2002) provide an alternative to categorisations of culture as systems of shared values or problem solving. In their review of the conceptualisation and measurement of culture, they suggest that "an individual's social identity represents that amalgamation of cultures across boundaries (national, organisational, professional, etc.) which fuse together to create one's overall culture. The combination is unique to each individual" (p. 18).

Review article: Critical overview


Critiquing Research: Relevance of theoretical models in today’s world

- How has the world changed since the research was published?
- How do these changes affect the relevance of the model in research and practice today?
- What new research is available on the topic?

Critical analysis is central to academic knowledge and your assignments will reflect this.

Sometimes a whole assignment is a critical analysis of a particular theoretical model(s) in a specific context

Example 1:
How useful is Hofstede's model of cultural variance in the context of the New Zealand secondary school classroom today? Discuss with reference to your own teaching situation.

- Provide a brief description of the theoretical model
- The rest of the assignment must consist of critical analysis
  - what does the literature say about the model?
  - is the model relevant to the given context?
  - what are the strengths and limitations of this model in the context?
  - which other model might be more appropriate in the context?

You may be asked to use current theory and research on a topic to critically analyse policy and practice in a specific field

Sample assignment:
With reference to current literature on the topic, critically analyse current policy and practice relating to the care of elderly hospice patients in New Zealand.

For example:
- What theoretical framework is at the foundation of the policy and practice? Eg. Definition of 'well-being' in this situation
- Is this framework appropriate in New Zealand?
  - Eg. Consider the multi-cultural population
- What does the literature say about best practice and how does current practice in New Zealand measure up against this?
- What are the areas of agreement/disagreement in the literature? What are the gaps in the literature on this topic?

Sometimes the whole assignment is a critique/critical analysis of a single scholarly article

Sample assignment:
Write a critique of the following journal article:

So...what do we know about theory and research?

- Theory changes as new evidence emerges from research
- There are multiple theoretical perspectives on a single topic
- Researchers use and adapt theoretical models for the context of their research
- Theory is always used critically in research
  - strengths and limitations are explained
  - other theoretical perspectives are acknowledged
- Critical analysis is central to what you will do as researchers in your assignments
Recommended books on academic writing available from Massey’s Library


Specific to areas of study:

Massey’s OWLL site

Academic writing: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing.php
Assignment planning calculator: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/assignment-planning-calculator.php
Computer skills: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/computer-skills.php
Postgraduate assignment types: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/postgraduate-study/postgraduate-assignment-types.php
Referencing: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/referencing.php
Sample assignments: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/sample-assignments.php
Stream and WebCT: http://owll.massey.ac.nz/stream.php

References
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