Research Capacity Building Workshop
7. Research Reading Skills Part 2

Online Forum

Go to the address: http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/

Click on the category *RPS Research Capacity Building,* and click on course *Research Matters.*

Materials are posted there online after workshops.

To log in:

User ID: staff or student number

Password: research

Once on *Research Matters*, go to the "Social forum", click on the message RESEARCH READING SKILLS PART 2: Mar 9 2012, and respond.

Today's Programme

- Introductions
- Impenetrable prose – various examples
- Discussion
- Recap
- Advice on:
  - selecting suitable sources
  - contextualising them in terms of their and your own orientation, and
  - understanding their meaning.

Writing can be "an intimidating and impenetrable fog".
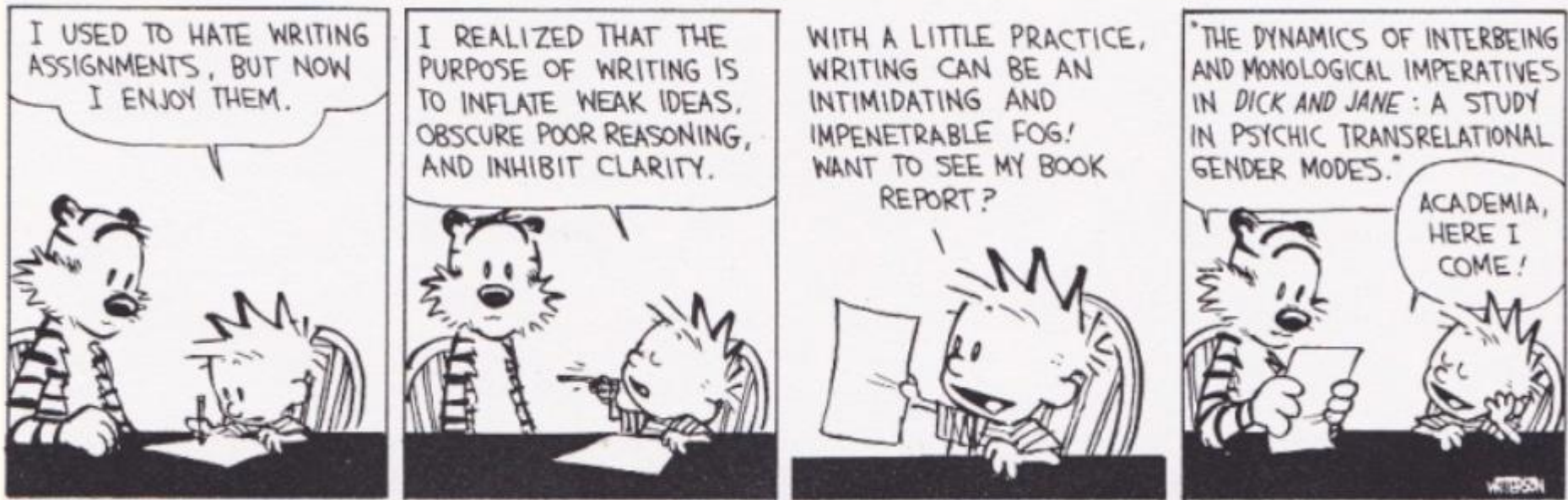
From Bhaskar's "most accessible book to date"

Indeed dialectical critical realism may be seen under the aspect of Foucauldian strategic reversal — of the unholy trinity of Parmenidean/Platonic/Aristotelean provenance; of the Cartesian-Lockean-Humean-Kantian paradigm, of foundationalisms (in practice, fideistic foundationalisms) and irrationalisms (in practice, capricious exercises of the will-to-power or some other ideologically and/or psycho-somatically buried source) new and old alike; of the primordial failing of western philosophy, ontological monovalence, and its close ally, the epistemic fallacy with its ontic dual; of the analytic problematic laid down by Plato, which Hegel served only to replicate in his actualist monovalent analytic reinstatement in transfigurative reconciling dialectical connection, while in his hubristic claims for absolute idealism he inaugurated the Comtean, Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean eclipses of reason, replicating the fundaments of positivism through its transmutation route to the superidealism of a Baudrillard.

How to confuse readers...

The constructivist view is therefore premised on the belief that a researcher always approaches a problem with a preconceived notion (a default theory) about the nature of the problem, and by implication, a possible solution for it (Fosnot, 1996). Such a perspective is not to be understood as a problem per se, but rather as an inevitable artifact of the research process. Constructivists believe that as long as researchers are transparent about their a priori theoretical position, the process of research is not impeded. However, they oppose a 'nomothetic'[1] approach to methodology, which assumes that researchers are essentially discoverers of 'natural' phenomena, and that adherence to systematic protocol and technique will eliminate all biases from the research process (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 6).

[1]"Of or relating to the study or discovery of general scientific laws"

Source:
Mir, R. & Watson, A. 2000. Strategic management and the philosophy of science: the case for a constructivist methodology. *Strategic Management Journal*, 21: 941–953.
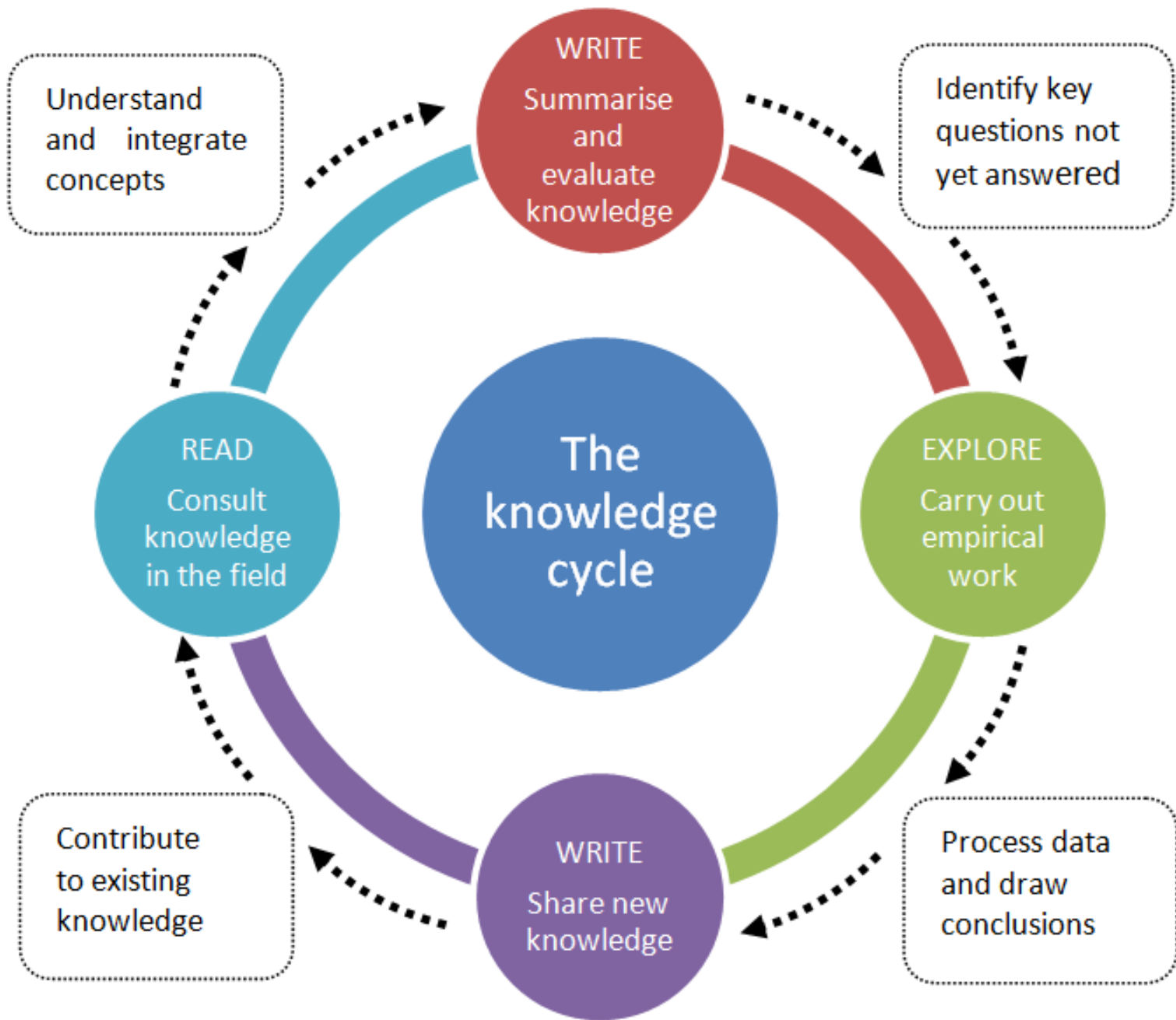
What Mir & Watson actually meant

Constructivists accept that researchers have ideas in advance about both the research problem and possible solutions. This belief should not be seen as a problem: it's the unavoidable result of research being what it is [i.e. looking for reasons why something happens the way it does]. Constructivists believe that, as long as researchers are upfront about the explanations they have thought up before they start investigating, there is nothing wrong with their research processes. What they don't agree with is a methodology based on the discovery of "natural laws" [i.e. a positivist methodology], and the idea that keeping to regular strict procedures will remove all bias from the research process.

Student interpretation:
…this data is representative of a social artefact – the object of inquiry in a constructivism-based research paradigm…. Usually, this approach to research is undertaken **so that a set of resultant findings can be used to develop an artefact** (Mir and Watson, 2000).

WE ARE HERE →

Understand and integrate concepts

WRITE
Summarise and evaluate knowledge

Identify key questions not yet answered

READ
Consult knowledge in the field

The knowledge cycle

EXPLORE
Carry out empirical work

Contribute to existing knowledge

WRITE
Share new knowledge

Process data and draw conclusions

Selecting and processing literature

This workshop undertook to offer practical advice on the following:

- selecting suitable sources
- contextualising them in terms of
  - their orientation
  - your own orientation
- understanding their meaning.

Some more theory (yuk!)

Read the extracts at the following addresses:

- http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/mod/resource/view.php?id=1545

- http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/mod/resource/view.php?id=1548

Respond to the message in the Social forum headed: "Theories and paradigms".

Three meanings of the term "paradigm"

Thomas Kuhn used the term "paradigm" with three quite different meanings in his seminal work[1]:

- Comprehensive world view, i.e. "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn 1962:175). Examples: positivism, constructivism, critical theory.

- Disciplinary matrix, i.e. "the common possession of the practitioners of a particular discipline" (Kuhn 1969:182). Examples: seminal works in the field, typical concepts, such as "subject position", "ontic dualism" .

- Exemplar, i.e. "shared examples" (Kuhn 1969: 187) typical of the field. Examples: shared rubrics, equations, formulae and problem solving techniques.

[1] Kuhn, T. (1962) *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [A "*Postscript*" recanting his earlier definition was published in 1969.]

Identify *your* "comprehensive world view"

Which viewpoint is "true" for you?

Reality is …

- relative to whoever is describing it, and is a mental construct only; *Constructivist*

- "really there" but we can't observe all of it and have to use intuitive leaps combined with logic to arrive at the truth; *Critical realist*

- able to be interpreted at an interpersonal level if people get together and share ideas; *Hermeneutic*

- "outside of us", and is only what can be observed, measured and calculated; *Positivist*

- obscured by false consciousness - we need to be "enlightened" to see how we are manipulated. *Critical (i.e. in the Marxist sense)*

Selecting suitable sources

Kuhn's three definitions are relevant in terms of your selection of sources for your thesis. Readings need to be selected to explain your:

- Research orientation ("world view")
- Specific area or discipline ("disciplinary matrix")
- Methodology ("exemplars" of how you solve problems)

Contextualising readings

In the same way that Kuhn's concepts underpin your own research *writing*, the content of what you are *reading* can be better understood if it is contextualised in terms of the following:

The author's:
- Orientation
- Specific area or discipline
- Methodology

Understanding what you read

The reader needs to identify:

- The author's position or "angle" (an issue of his/her beliefs and values). *World view*

- The author's tendency to use certain specialist concepts, terms and to refer to certain experts in the field. *Disciplinary matrix*

- The author's preference for certain specific methods or protocols, e.g. inferential statistics, discourse analysis. *Exemplars*

To recap, *Research Reading Skills Part 1* suggested some purposes the literature serves.

The literature:

- contextualises your research in terms of the body of knowledge available.
- summarises research in the field.
- Gives insight into the **disciplinary matrix** of the field. *Disciplinary matrix*
- acts as an **exemplar** of scholarly writing. *Exemplars*
- models **research orientations** and methodologies. *World view*
- can be used to reference a fact or opinion.
- can be used as evidence to support your argument.
- demonstrates knowledge of the field or area.
- demonstrates you have mastered certain **research conventions**. *Exemplars*

For better understanding of what you read

Assess the author's:

- Orientation /theoretical approach *[world view]*
- Disciplinary approach, buzz words and favourite authors *[disciplinary matrix]*
- Pet methods for data gathering and analysis; types of evidence or ways of arguing a case *[exemplars]*

Use a simplified version (summary or overview, glossary, encyclopedia, schoolbook) if you have difficulty understanding the language .

Be critical of what you read

Literature in the field is "evidence" but *it's just something someone else said*. Researchers should be critical of the literature and point out shortcomings (critique). This can be done on the basis of:

1. how convincing the writer's evidence is (writer's experience, empirical basis - e.g. size of sample, generalisability - motives, approach)
2. criticism or opposing views in the literature
3. your own experience/empirical work.