CHIP-5

Concepts and history in psychology

Disciplinary neighbours

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http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/courses/chip.html

Introduction: disciplinary neighbours

This lecture topic

This lecture is about disciplinary differences, and relationships between disciplines.

Why does this matter?
One way to understand how psychology operates, and to evaluate it, is to compare it to other disciplines.

The WHO definition of health is inter-disciplinary (1946)

"Health is a state of complete

- physical,
- mental, and
- social well-being;

and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

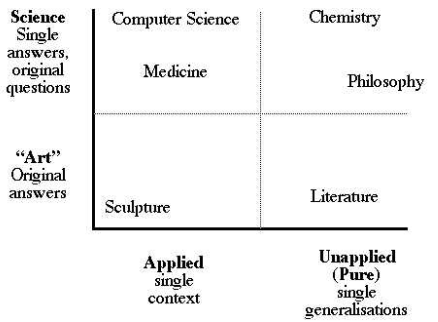
[Medicine, psychology, sociology?]

http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html

Psychology's neighbours

Philosophy
Sociology
Anthropology
Physiology, neurology
Biology, (evolutionary psy)
Computer science, artificial intelligence
(Education) IQ, testing (psychometrics), learning
Psychiatry, medicine
Personnel management (HR); management
Linguistics, psycholinguistics,

A map: where would psychology go?



Part 2:

Susan Stuart:

Consciousness

7

Part 3:

Disciplines and their idiosyncratic nature

8

Disciplines (0)

Not necessarily very permanent ….

Vision science

Botany vs. Zoology

Immunology

Biochemistry

Languages —> cultural studies, the fragmentation of language depts.

9

Disciplines (1)

Disciplines really do shape a person's mind. They think differently about things depending on the discipline(s) they've been trained within.

What do you think disciplines are defined by?

(subject matter, research approach, teaching method, …)

Take a few minutes solo, and write down what you think.
Only then, discuss/debate your answer with a neighbour.

10

Disciplines (2)

Disciplines really do shape a person's mind. They think differently about things depending on the discipline(s) they've been trained within.

⇒ So one possible way to define them is as a way of thinking, a characteristic approach to problems. [compSci, …]

Subject matter [but: physics vs. mechanical engineering; nursing vs. being a doctor]

Even the meaning of "research" differs. (It's a science word, not normally used by Humanities scholars.)

Teaching ("signature pedagogies")

11

Disciplines (3): CDC (1)

There is a real sense that the central learning aim of a history degree is to learn to write a history essay.

In psychology, to write a psychology essay.

In physics, to demonstrate analysis, reasoning and calculation like a physicist (not like an accountant, or mathematician, or logician)

I.e. a different way to **define** what **a discipline** is, is in terms of the **kind of thinking** about any new problem which it displays. And this is revealed in the way they teach the discipline over a degree programme in terms of the "core disciplinary criteria" which they use for marking across assignments.

Core disciplinary assessment criteria (2)

So on this account, the key question for each discipline is:
What is the assessment criterion that is closest to meaning:
"Display thinking like a scholar in this discipline"?

Many disciplines in HE already have much of their assessment organised around a single standard format that exhibits this thinking style e.g. essays for most Arts and Social Science subjects (but actually, quite different essay types depending on the discipline), "problem solving" involving calculation i.e. inferential maths in most science and engineering.

Focussing feedback to students on grasping the core criteria is often key.

13

CDC 3: Psychology honours design

For the students responding to NSS 2009, the design had been:
Level 3:
9 modules, class exam with some formative feedback on 4
Level 4:
6 modules, no related coursework

BUT

Level 3:
2 CRs (critical reviews), 2 miniprojects with tutorial groups of 5-6
Level 4:
1 CR, 1 project each with a personal tutor

14

CDC 4: Psychology honours design (2)

So the programme design could be redescribed as investing 100% of its tutor time in focussing on equipping the students with the ability to display critical thinking (of the kind a psychologist values). It invented a type of coursework ("critical review") that announces to students what the main point is; it requires them to produce 3 month long pieces of work focussed on it; but also marks their exams with this requirement applied.

It is the hardest thing they must learn; the most important thing; almost all our teaching investment is put into it; and in the 2009 NSS, students rated us 5 out of 107 in the UK.

15

Dimensions (1)

Can we find a system for classifying, mapping the set of existing disciplines? Are there just a few underlying ways in which they vary from each other?

Many (not all) studies come up with 2 dimensions.
Different authors describe these differently, but my version is:
1) Pure vs. applied
2) Humanities vs. science . "Arts" vs. science .

16

Humanities vs. science

Art vs. science // objective vs. subjective // abstract, concrete // soft, hard // public, private

Science studies what nature has; inanimate effects.
The Humanities study what humans have done or created; human agency.

So Humanities address intentionality, perspectives, feelings
So are likely to require uncertainty, perspectives, relativity.
You might say they are reflection on past human action, and look for (almost always multiple) perspectives.
Often (not always) this is grounded on human subjective judgments (-- what other standard is relevant?)

These in turn lead to characteristic modes of thought: unresolved questions, seeking to problematise not problem-solve.

17

N.B. "Problem solving"

Employers frequently say they want graduates to do this. But really there are 3 contrasting component skills:

a) Problematising: taking what others are letting slide by as OK, and flagging it up as something that needs treating as a problem. Every time a big fraud in a firm emerges, it is because people (auditors, ...) let it by. In fact employers need problem-spotters, although not all realise this.

b) Redefining an identified but ill-specified problem into something specific that can be addressed.

c) Solving it: pushing through to an actionable decision and conclusion. Generally speaking, the Sciences drill their graduates on this all the time, and the Humanities do not; (or perhaps the applied disciplines do but the pure ones do not.)