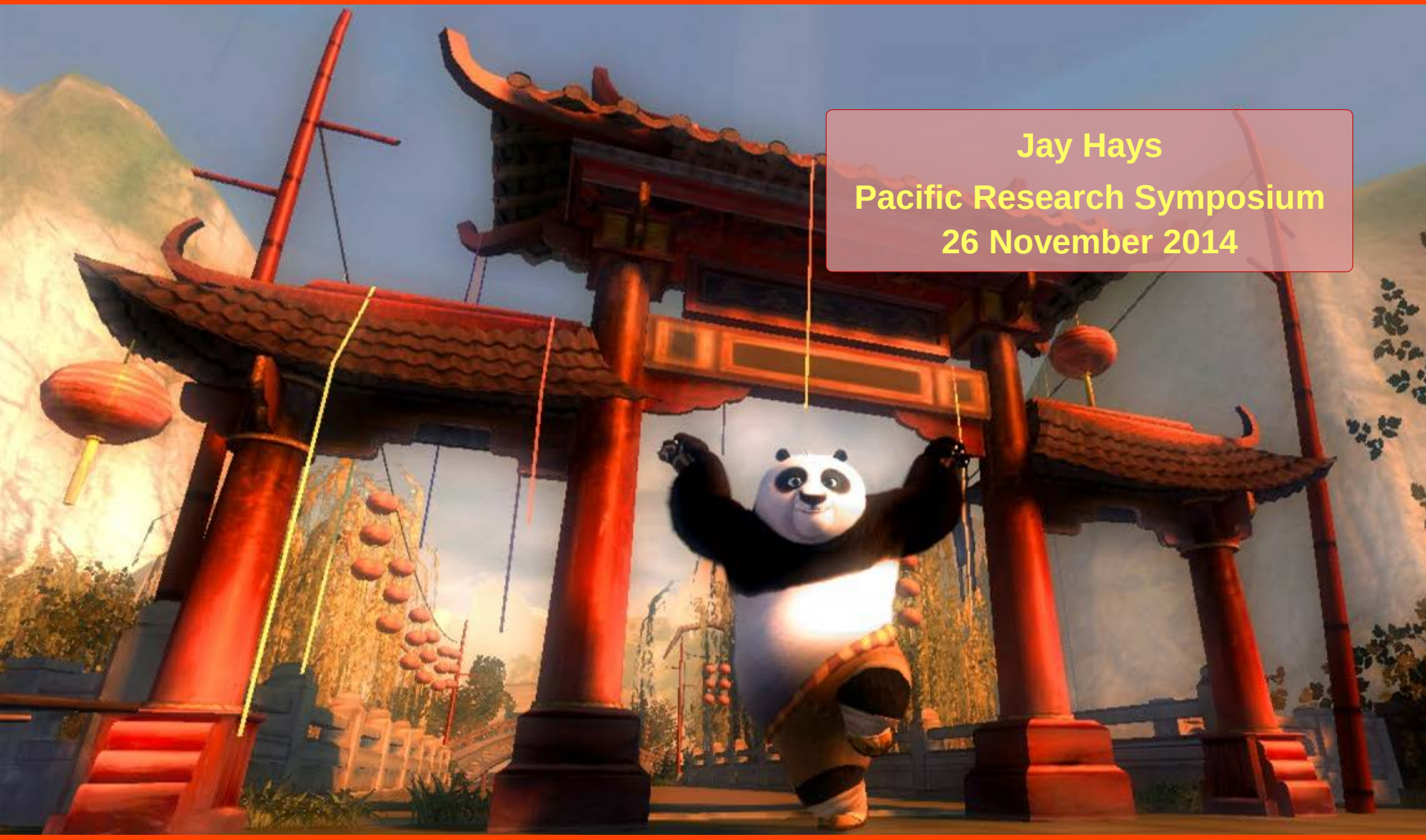
Reasoning, Judgement, and Reflective Action



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Pacific Research Symposium
26 November 2014

A Model for Curriculum Innovation and Proposed Collaborative Research in the Pacific Region

RJRA

Reasoning

Judgement

Reflective Action

Presentation built on a draft research brief that outlines a proposed study and presents review of the literature.

Research brief began in another life as a plan for a cross-cultural study of post-graduate management and MBA students in Australia and Malaysia.

Research team members have all relocated interstate or internationally.

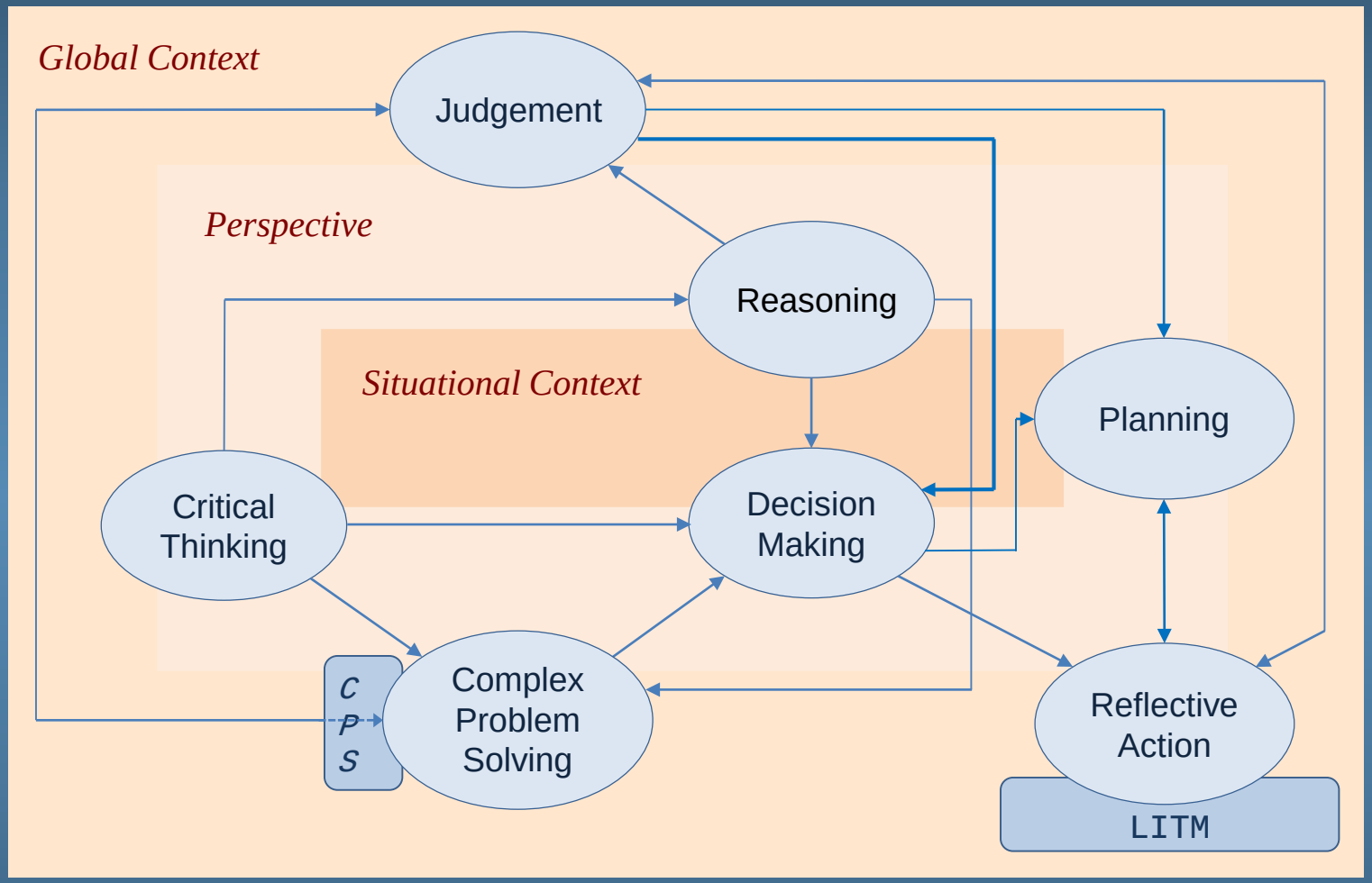
I come before you today seeking individuals and teams who might like to “spin off” our original proposal and conduct one or more studies in New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region.

Study involves development and validation of:

- An instructional unit for RJRA
- An evaluation regime (measures and process) permitting baseline and post-intervention assessment

At the centre of the study is a proposed model for RJRA.

Inner Peace



Dynamic model of RJRA

Figure 1. Model depicting assumed relationships amongst key elements.

Elements are individually (and sometimes partially collectively) the focus of instruction, touted as skills graduates will possess, and sought by stakeholders.

They are generally dealt with discretely in the literature, if attended to with any rigour at all.

While reasonable from an instructional (and research) point of view, this treatment of elements in isolation is problematic, reducing:

- **appreciation of the systemic nature of RJRA**
- **opportunities to leverage holistic learning.**

The elements operate synergistically in concert.

The study is founded on the belief that most individuals capable of university study can develop higher-order thinking cap-abilities, and that these capabilities can be measured in meaningful and credible ways.

While emphasising higher-order thinking capacities, we are not merely concerned with fulfilling cognitive potential in terms of thought, but also of demonstrating its outcome in practice—in effective, ethical, and sustainable behaviour.

We want to see, for example, effective problem-solving, decision-making, planning, and implementation in authentic settings.

This is especially important in an institution promoting applied practice.

I’m really in to this.

Unconsciously, RJRA has permeated my thinking and teaching.

21st Century Survival Skills

- Critical Thinking
- Leadership
- Ethics
- Teamwork
- Entrepreneurship

Critical Thinking is an assessment and inquiry process needed to solve problems and make decisions where no definitive answer may exist.

It is, thus, related to judgement: one must come to a reasoned and defensible conclusion—the best possible solution or decision given information available at the time.

Critical Thinking is a search for truth.

Qualities of a critical thinker include:

- Raises questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely.
- Gathers and assesses relevant information.
- Comes to well-reasoned conclusions and then tests them out against relevant standards.
- Thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought and seeks alternative perspectives, and assesses their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences.
- Communicates with others effectively in determining solutions to complex problems.

Qualities of a critical thinker include:

THEY HAVE A DESIRE TO THINK AND THE DISCIPLINE, PERSISTENCE, AND COURAGE TO PURSUE BEST-POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS…

EVEN WHEN THESE SOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS DO NOT ALIGN WITH THE CRITICAL THINKER'S INITIAL BELIEFS OR DESIRES.

THEY ARE WILLING AND ABLE TO "CHANGE THEIR MINDS".

Qualities of a critical thinker include:

Critical Thinkers are reflective and mindful.

- They “follow” their own thinking and work hard to keep it objective and methodical.

- They reflect on their behaviour, including their patterns of thought, learning and improving as they go.

RJRA seeks to deepen and extend cognitive capacities, promote habits of mind, and cultivate dispositions to behave in ways that are constructive and sustainable.

These capacities and dispositions can be developed outside of particular disciplines, but are perhaps of most relevance within them.

In any event, there probably always needs to be a context within which RJRA apply.

We are not talking about advanced skills in the discipline, though we are alluding to a contextually-suitable application of sophisticated thinking... a big picture kind of thinking.

Some of the meta-abilities we are concerned with in the 21st Century:

- Ingenuity
- Creativity
- Vision
- Insight
- Mindfulness
- Inspiration
- Intuition
- Inventiveness
- Receptivity
- Resourcefulness
- Improvisation
- Tolerance for ambiguity and paradox

Where do they come from?

How do you measure them?

These questions are at the heart of this proposed research program.

If you are at all interested in these questions, or know someone who might be, get in touch!

CONCLUSIONS

Training in reasoning, judgement, decision-making, and associated problem-solving and critical thinking skills is neglected in Higher Education.

This despite the fact that they epitomise professional competence, and could reasonably be considered Desired Graduate Attributes and Key Generic Skills, qualities many universities, governments, and industry agree are essential in university graduates.

CONCLUSIONS

This shortfall may be because educating for RJRA is seen as too hard or someone else's responsibility, or assumed to develop organically, either through normal university coursework or professional employment, or in combining study and work.

It may be difficult to educate for RJRA, though is in no way impossible.

CONCLUSIONS

Nevertheless, educating for reasoning, judgement, and reflective action must be different, for conventional units fail to consistently engender higher-order capacities.

Traditional coursework and teaching methods may increase subject knowledge and relevant skills, but they don't necessarily equip graduates with transferable skills they can bring to bear in novel contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Meaningful learning enables transfer: the student's ability to solve novel problems or extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts

If what university students learn cannot transfer it is of little practical value.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching a new way of thinking is entirely different than teaching specific knowledge and skills. It cannot be approached directly. Employing principles and processes of meta-cognition and meta-learning, it requires the learner developing a conscious appreciation for new ways of thinking and approaching problems and supplanting existing unproductive ones.

This holds equally true for students and teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The way we approach teaching and study now is deeply ingrained, and does not always permit optimal learning.

These habits can change.

Recognising what may be limiting us, what we need to do differently, and how we can make change a reality can and should be the focus for reasoning, judgement, and reflective action.

Thank you for your attention and forbearance.

And, remember…


Every master must find his own path to inner peace.