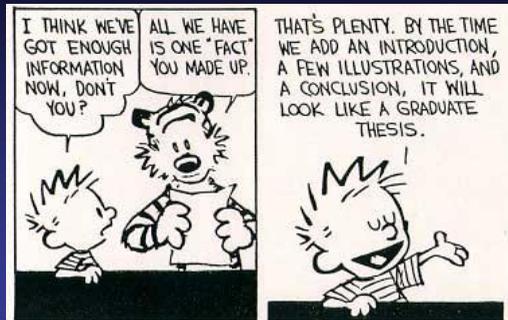


CONCEPT, ARGUMENT, METHOD AND DEBATE: Strategies for producing a strong book chapter/ academic journal article in the social sciences



Carl Middleton Ph.D.

Concepts and theory

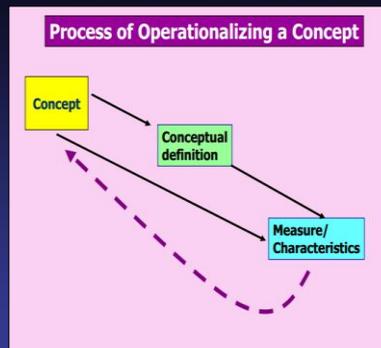
- In academic and policy writing, to put forward an argument is to propose an explanation using an idea/ concept and to back this up with evidence
- It is to enter *into a debate*, often in the written language, and through a process of critique build knowledge



Even as our project is “Research for Development”, with the intention to improve policy and practice, writing can help us be sure of our analysis and make solid recommendations

Concepts and theory

- A mental image of something or a causal event (with dependent and independent variables)
- Concepts are not real and do not exist, except as an idea
- Your concept will link you to an academic field and a debate within it
 - Concepts differ across people and cultures
- It helps you focus and explain



What is the key concept that will be at the heart of your chapter?

Concepts and theory

- Poverty
- Development
- Sustainability
- Human Rights
- Human Development
- Human Security
- Globalization
- Civil Society
- Welfare State
- Inequality
- Social Justice
- Marginalization
- Identity
- Impact Assessment
- Participation
- Discourse
- Social movement
- Politics of knowledge
- **Vulnerability**
- **Risk**
- **Hazard**

A conceptual framework will bring several concepts into relation with one another – for example “Vulnerability, risk, flood hazard?”

Clarify your concept

- Which concept did you chose?
- Why this concept?
- How is it related to your case study or subject of interest?
- Whose concept?
- Definition of the concepts
- Your own choice and definition of the concept

(Concept generates...) Question

- These are the big questions (e.g. market vs state regulation in water governance), but also smaller more researchable questions

What questions entail a descriptive answer

Why questions ask for causes or reasons for a particular phenomenon

How questions ask how to bring about change with practical outcomes and intervention

- “What groups of people are **vulnerable to the risk of flood hazard** in Bangkok?”
- Why are they **vulnerable to risk of flood hazards**?
- How could **vulnerability to risk of flood hazards** be reduced?

Check – Is your chapter/ paper’s research question linked to your concept? (Make sure you do have clear questions)

(Concept generates...) Claims

- These are statements that represent specific ideas or arguments, such as (Sometimes these are represented as a hypothesis)
 - “People with lower income are more vulnerable and live in places more at risk of flood hazard”

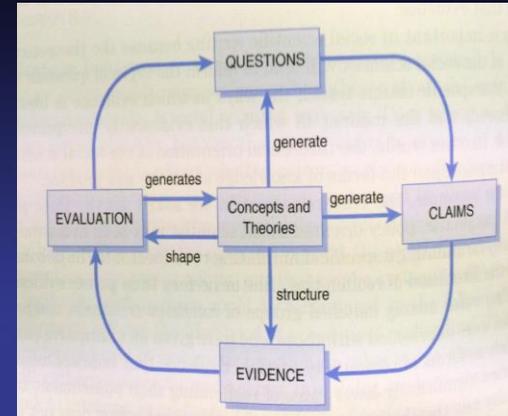
(Concept structure...) Evidence

- Includes both observable and deduced data, includes examples, case studies, quantitative surveys
 - Measuring income level and vulnerability; measuring risk; determining the types of flood hazard

Evaluation

- **Evaluation** *generates* concepts and theories ...
 - ... and concepts and theories *shapes* **evaluation**
 - Evaluation requires logic or reasoning. You might evaluate (judge) a *claim* in light of the *evidence*.
 - Could be nuanced - *evidence* as 'weak' or 'strong'
- Does your work affirm the existing concepts?
 - Does it refute them?
 - Does it offer an alternative explanation?
 - Does the use of the concept offer a new approach to an existing problem (hard vs soft infrastructure in flood risk management)
 - Did you "transplant" an existing concept to a new problem? (Politics of knowledge in Health Impact Assessment)

The role of concept / theory



Next session

- 10 min [Individual work]: Identify the main concept and argument in their own conference paper and your partners conference paper. Each will be extracted and written in a couple of sentences in your own words.
- 30 min [Group work] Compare notes to see if the arguments match. Discuss with your partner your understanding of the main argument of the other's paper, and how to strengthen it (test it)
- 10 min [Individual work] Refine your own argument and write it down.