

Syntheses, Reflections, and Conjectures in *Scholarly and Research Communication: SRC*¹⁺¹

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Twenty-first century research and education rests on two transforming foundations. Most recently, to maintain education during the COVID-19 pandemic, lectures have been formalized into media presentations that students can access online. More gradually, yet at breakneck speed, the boundaries and dynamics of social knowledge are being redrawn by digital social behavioural data and analysis and evolving social and environment frameworks. *Scholarly and Research Communication (SRC)* wishes to capture the manifestations of these tectonic shifts.

Syntheses

The transformation of oral presentations into more formal, online-friendly lectures that lack the benefit of in-the-moment student-lecturer interaction has, in best-case examples, unveiled the ongoing analysis and synthesis that has always been foundational to academic work. Some of these recastings have revealed elegant and original contributions to knowledge.

To illustrate the nature and value of this newly structured academic work, and following in the faded footsteps of the public lectures of the Royal Institution of Great Britain in 1799, *SRC* is publishing the McCarron Lectures on Rhetoric and Communication. These first-in-a-series lectures constitute an original contribution to knowledge. They are an exhilarating example of a scholar at work reviewing accumulated insights; establishing a methodology; acknowledging the boundaries of the discussion; and, overall, amalgamating those insights into a whole.

Reflections and conjectures

Twenty-first century knowledge of social behaviour operates on a foundation of previously non-existent data and analysis and on evolving social frameworks that take into account the global, social, and environmental realities to which digital communication contributes. These rather substantial changes suggest a need to reconfigure social inquiry. *SRC* offers a model for doing so.

In “Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge,” Karl Popper points to the central role of refutation in the advancement of science. Einstein’s much

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discussed thought experiments confirmed the central role of conjecture to theoretical development. Subsequently, the key role of experimental testing (and possibly refuting) theory has been highlighted (Boston University, 2019).

In the humanities and social sciences, conjecture in the form of theorizing based on focused investigations is common. However, a bold emphasis on disciplined big-picture reflection and conjecture that takes into account diversity and environmentalism alongside big data, algorithmic-based analytics, and artificial intelligence appears to have potential in understanding the nature and implications of ongoing monumental change.

Accordingly, SRC is adding two pieces to the McCarron lectures. The first is Andrew Nurse's conjecture on the changing nature of post-colonial historical practice in Canada. The second is Julie Bayley, David Phipps, Tony Roche, and Steve Lodge's conjecture on combining open access and knowledge mobilization to enhance the contributions of research to society.

SRC welcomes new submissions that focus on syntheses of existing knowledge, reflections on the nature of that knowledge, and conjectures on evolving understandings. Letters of inquiry to Lorimer@sfu.ca are welcome.

Reference

Boston University. (2019, February 28). Friendly feuds: Experimental physicists vs. theoretical physicists [Video]. *YouTube*. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IET9VX_Ufrc [June 1, 2021].