

TOK Exhibition

What is the relationship between personal experience and knowledge? Word count: 945

Object 1. Picture from the highest peak of the Slovak Republic



This picture of my family, and I was taken on the highest peak of Slovakia, Gerlachovský štít'. This photograph symbolises my acquisition of procedural and propositional knowledge through my personal experience of climbing the mountain. Procedural knowledge refers to the knowing of how to do things, whereas propositional knowledge is knowledge that some proposition is true. This object shows that some knowledge can be acquired only through personal experience. Theoretical knowledge on how to climb a mountain, such as the equipment needed, might be helpful beforehand, however if not applied it becomes useless. By experiencing to ascend personally, one discovers that it is very different; experience in the field is needed to be able to manoeuvre in the unpredictable conditions. For example, I have been taught how to climb on an indoor climbing wall, however it had not fully prepared me on climbing a real mountain wall. I had to get used to climbing in cold weather, where my hands would often not be able to grasp the slippery rocks. Additionally, I have to gain propositional knowledge on behaviour in the mountains. For example, without personally experiencing the mountain culture, I would not have known that it is considered rude not to greet people descending. This object portrays that there is a strong relationship between personal experience and knowledge. In this case, knowledge is dependent on personal experience because it enhances one's skills and understanding of the theoretical knowledge. This is also evident through the fact that people are only allowed to enter to ascend in the company of a mountain guide. Tourists are required to be accompanied by them because it is recognised that theoretical knowledge is not sufficient in this case and has to be accompanied by years of personal experience, in order to ensure a safe return.

¹ "Gerlachovský štít' can be conquered only in the company of a mountain guide."

Jozef Terem, *Výstup na Gerlachovský štít* (2012), *Dobrodruh* <<https://dobrodruh.sk/kam-na-slovensku/vystup-na-gerlachovsky-stit>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

Object 2. Name tag from my first debating tournament



This object is a name tag from my first debating competition. The name tag symbolises my first encounter with the debating community and their rules, which included relying on one's own knowledge when debating theses given to us thirty minutes before the competition without the use of the internet. Using examples from personal experience (anecdotal evidence), when debating for example discrimination and its negative effects, was heavily discouraged and teams would be marked down for it. In this case, personal experience was seen as inferior to scientific research or data, and it downgraded the overall knowledge used in the debate. Debating relies on the skills of analysing global issues objectively, and it often includes ignoring any previous opinions the debater has on the matter. Anecdotal evidence was seen as subjective, since it could influence the debater's ability to critically analyse and argue the thesis by their personal feelings, opinions and previous experience. Therefore, the use of personal experience in the debate would not only show that the debater lacked the skill to depersonalise from the matter discussed, but would also point towards the fact that they lacked scientific data and had to debate using anecdotal evidence. This object shows that in some academic settings, personal experience does not contribute to knowledge, but indeed harms it. This is because debates, based on discussing ethical non-factual (neither right nor wrong) issues, rely on using unbiased facts to find the best solution to the proposed problem. Impersonal evidence and analysis would, in contrast to the anecdotal evidence, be perceived as less reliable because the debater has already demonstrated lack of skills in working with evidence in general. This object demonstrates that links between personal experience and knowledge has to be abandoned in some academic settings in order for participants to reach an objective and reliable conclusion that is not affected by one's personal feelings and opinions, downgrading the overall evidence by demonstrating lacking skills in gathering verified evidence.

Object 3. A Russian book



This object is a Russian book I have accidentally found in the school library titled, in translation, *About crocodiles in Russia*. This book represents how my personal experience of being a native speaker of another Slavic language helped me with acquiring knowledge of Russian. Without speaking Russian fluently and having little to no vocabulary, but knowing the Cyrillic alphabet, I was able to read and understand the title of this book. This object demonstrates that personal experience can give advantage to some knowers when acquiring knowledge. Russian, in this case, can be learned by anyone, regardless of what other languages that person already speaks. However, when learning the language that is similar to the one that the person already masters, they are given a huge advantage. Personal experience, not just knowledge of any Slavic language, is needed because Slavic languages tend to be very tricky in pronunciation and grammatical rules, thus having them internalised when speaking them entire lives or engaging with them on daily bases gives the speaker a huge advantage when learning for example Russian. They lack the need to stop and think whether what was said is correct because they just know it sounds right, having a similar language internalised. This gives certain people seeking specific knowledge a huge advantage compared to other knowers who lack the personal experience of encountering and speaking similar languages every day. This also applies to other language families, for example Italian and Spanish, Finnish and Hungarian, or German and Dutch. Therefore, the fact that I was able to understand the title of this book and the overall meaning of some sentences demonstrates that my extensive personal experience with my native language gives me an advantage when seeking knowledge of other Slavic languages. This object demonstrates that extensive personal experience gives knowledge seeking individuals an advantage, although unintentionally since they did not choose to gain it, when acquiring different knowledge.

Bibliography

Terem, Jozef, *Výstup na Gerlachovský štít* (2012), *Dobrodruh* <<https://dobrodruh.sk/kam-na-slovensku/vystup-na-gerlachovsky-stit>> [accessed 26 May 2022]

Object 1: Image from author's family's private collection

Object 2: Image from author's private collection

Object 3: Image from author's private collection

