



National Centre for
Research Methods

Pedagogic Language and Pedagogic Competence: Does it Make Sense to Talk about Research Methods Pedagogy in the Social Sciences?

ECER 2017 Abstract

Sarah Lewthwaite, National Centre for Research
Methods, University of Southampton, UK.

s.e.lewthwaite@soton.ac.uk

Melanie Nind, National Centre for Research Methods,
University of Southampton, UK.

m.a.nind@soton.ac.uk

Introduction

This short paper reports from ongoing research at the National Centre for Research Methods into the pedagogy of advanced methods teaching. This work widens the focus of research from individual experiences of methods teaching to empirical evidence that bridges disciplines, schools of method and international contexts. Here we consider the relationship between pedagogic language and pedagogic competence, and how these relate to the development of pedagogical culture in methods teaching.

Across Europe increasing attention is being paid to the development of research capacity in Universities, government and industry. Spurred by the challenges posed by new forms of data, multiple archival digitization projects, central investments (such as Big Data Europe¹) and a push towards professionalization, the need to equip researchers with advanced (post graduate/postdoctoral) methods competencies is felt as never before.

In practice, this places emphasis on doctoral and postdoctoral training that focusses on the acquisition, maintenance and continuing development of transferable skills necessary for effective research across different contexts, rather than within the discrete boundaries of (for example) the doctoral project. This takes the form of the formalization of doctoral training connected to the Salzburg Principles (Kottmann, 2011) and short courses, high-profile international summer and winter schools² and online learning. In the UK, these efforts are supported by large government investments, such as the National Centre for Research Methods (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council).

Methods demand a unique mix of technical skills, procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding (Kilburn et al, 2015). However, despite seismic developments in doctoral training and capacity building, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK, Shulman, 1986) concerning *how* teachers answer the specific challenges of methods teaching is limited. This is exacerbated by a lack of pedagogical culture (Earley, 2014; Wagner et al, 2011) evidenced by lack of pedagogical research, networks and dialogue within the field (for example, expressed in cross-citation, events and other markers indicative of the exchange and development and critique of ideas). As a result, new methods teachers must rely on trial-and-error and immediate peers to develop their practice (Earley, 2014). To address these gaps, our ESRC-funded research at NCRM asks: How are advanced social research methods taught and learned? This invokes a central concern with making pedagogy visible. We contend that 'pedagogy is hard to know' (Nind et al., 2016), but that developing knowledge of how pedagogy is specified, enacted and experienced in practice (Nind et al., 2016) is essential developing PCK (Shulman, 1986) and with it, pedagogic culture.

To advance these goals our research is built upon four underlying principles. First that there is a need to develop the pedagogical culture around research methods. Second that there is benefit in identifying and deepening pedagogic content knowledge. Third that dialogue represents a particular pedagogic and methodological asset in the furthering of our research aims. Fourth that there is value in the use of explicit, shared pedagogy.

¹ <http://www.big-data-europe.eu>

² Such as the Digital Methods Initiative Summer/Winter School (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands), GESIS Summer School in Survey Methodology (Liebniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany), Winter School in Methods and Techniques (Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences, Hungary), Methods@Manchester (University of Manchester, UK).

To this end, we have established meta-themes from our analysis that characterise methods teaching activities. In this paper we explore two key aspects of the research. Firstly, insights into methods teaching and pedagogy from the first wave of our analysis. Second, what these insights into methods teaching have to tell us about language and competence in the development of research methods more broadly.

Methodology

Our research design incorporates four strands, expressing a commitment to dialogic methods that build pedagogic knowledge with participants, by deepening conceptual exchange rather than judging or evaluating. Methods used include expert panel; video stimulated recall, reflection and dialogue (VSRR); online learning diaries; and case studies. The results and conceptual work discussed here flow from expert panel and VSRR research and our analysis on the role and use of pedagogic language within expert methodologist/teacher talk.

Expert panel research (after Galliers and Huang, 2012) has been completed in two stages. The first, with eight experts in methods and teaching in the UK (2012-13), the second with an international focus (2015-16). In this second panel of 13 experts, we purposefully targeted international experts across Europe (comprising academics from the Netherlands and Switzerland), the Americas, Africa and Australasia, to provide a nuanced account of pedagogical expertise in a socio-cultural frame. These 'pedagogic leaders' (Lucas and Claxon, 2013) were interviewed on the basis of methodological excellence, landmark publications, editorial roles in international journals and learned societies, and significant teaching experience at a postgraduate level.

Following transcription, an initial thematic analysis was conducted independently by two researchers. Emergent findings were then discussed among the experts in an online forum and by seven focus groups with experienced methods teachers, and an online forum of 18 early career and PhD researchers. In this way, dialogue was instigated across various groups involved in teaching research methods, to understand the resonance of the identified themes, and how these are realised and expressed in different contexts.

The second component involved observing and video-recording six days of short-course methods teaching and using video to stimulate recall, reflection and dialogue with teachers and learners in focus groups immediately after each event. This work engages learners and teachers in co-constructive dialogue about the learning process that is elicited by, and deeply referent to, tangible events within the classroom (Nind et al., 2015).

Again, data was coded independently by two researchers and interpretations shared, where possible, with participants. Subsequent analysis related to our research questions, and focussed on pedagogic themes associated with methods teaching, as well as understanding how learning theory and pedagogy and research have informed this process. We coded for typologies of talk, to recognise both the explicit and named pedagogies extant in the data, and the un-named, implicit pedagogies that teachers were also found to use.

Findings and Conclusions

Experts recognised the need to build spaces for dialogue, to share resources, ideas and 'to continue to foster a kind of interdisciplinary pedagogical culture'. They observed a lack of 'occasion to engage' and a need 'to look at various perspectives and exercises ... used

successfully in classes'. In lieu of this, the majority of teachers are found to build teaching expertise over the course of a life-time responding directly to the challenges of methods learners, content and context, rather than, for example, formal teacher training. Approaches to teaching are built upon pedagogic roots: experiences of learning and being taught, methodological experiences, early teaching experiences as well as beliefs and values. Experts and teachers with educational backgrounds and developed pedagogical interests demonstrate developed pedagogical vocabulary that enabled them to articulate their approaches and strategies. As a result, typologies of talk available in our data range from named and explicit pedagogies, where teachers and experts are able to talk about learning theory or pedagogy, alongside unnamed/implicit pedagogies that, with the dialogic methods we are using, can be made visible as teachers discuss their teaching repertoire and reflect on approaches pedagogically in new ways.

Named and explicit pedagogies were found to cluster around three themes: active learning – which connects learners to research through hands-on activities; and other more experiential approaches; and the pedagogies associated with engaging multiple perspectives, critical standpoints and reflexivity (see also, Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). However, a substantial body of implicit and unnamed pedagogies identified in the data remain, raising interrelated questions going forward: Does pedagogic development require specialist language? Is pedagogic vocabulary necessary for the development of pedagogical competencies? It is hoped that findings addressing these key questions will help to bridge methodological and pedagogical divides to build methodological capacity across Europe and beyond.

References

- Earley, M. (2014) A synthesis of the literature on research methods education, *Teaching in Higher Education*. 19 (3), 242-253
- Galliers, R. D. and Huang, J. C. (2012) The teaching of qualitative methods in information systems: an explorative study utilizing learning theory. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 21, 119-134. doi: 10.1057/ejis.2011.44
- Kottmann, A. (2011) Reform of doctoral training in Europe: A silent revolution? In J. Enders et al. (Eds) *Reform of Higher Education in Europe*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Lewthwaite, S. and Nind, M. (2016) Teaching research methods in the social sciences: Expert perspectives on pedagogy and practice, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2016.1197882.
- Lucas, B. and G. Claxton. 2013. *Pedagogic Leadership: Creating Cultures and Practices for Outstanding Vocational Learning*. Winchester: 157 Group.
- Nind, M., Curtin, A., and Hall, K. (2016) *Research methods for pedagogy*. Bloomsbury: London.
- Nind, M., Kilburn, D. and Wiles, R. (2015) Using video and dialogue to generate pedagogic knowledge: teachers, learners and researchers reflecting together on the pedagogy of social research methods, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18 (5), 561-57.
- Shulman, L. (1986) Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15, 4-14

Wagner, C., M. Garner, and B. Kawulich. (2011) The state of the art of teaching research methods in the social sciences: towards a pedagogical culture. *Studies in Higher Education* 36, no. 1:75-88.