

Pedagogy in context: international experts' insights into the teaching of advanced research methods. (0244)

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Abstract:

This paper sets out the findings from new research into the teaching of advanced social science research methods. We present an in-depth study into the teaching and learning of advanced research methods conducted by researchers at the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). We outline how current concerns about a methodological skills deficit have shaped debate in the UK, and draw upon insights from in-depth interviews with international experts to reflect on the situated nature of advanced methods teaching and learning. From here, we examine how the pedagogical approaches, challenges and demands identified within and across international contexts can elucidate the pedagogic challenges of advanced methods teaching and learning in the UK. During our presentation we will engage delegates in critical dialogue regarding how these findings and the broader questions of how pedagogic culture and practice might respond to global trends and international tensions in social research.

Paper Outline:

Advanced research requires a unique combination of theoretical understanding, procedural knowledge and skills competence; nonetheless, there has been little research about pedagogy associated with this. In the UK, doctoral researchers have learned through an apprenticeship model of supervision, with taught courses and formal training becoming a more recent requirement. Subsequent capacity building has focused on the incorporation of core and advanced training tailored toward the professional and methodological development of researchers. The lack of 'pedagogic culture' (Wagner et al, 2011), i.e. lack of debate, investigation and evaluation regarding how research methods are taught and learned is problematic (Earley, 2014). Little is understood about how best to respond to the distinctive pedagogical challenges in this field.

To engage with this concern, the ESRC is funding a three-year *Pedagogy of Methodological Learning* project at the National Centre for Research Methods (<http://pedagogy.ncrm.ac.uk>). The project seeks to investigate and promote pedagogical development for advanced social science research methods. Within this paper, we use 'advanced methods' to refer to a focus on teaching with learners who are already involved in research (at postgraduate level and beyond), whether in academia or other sectors. Advanced training in social research methods is primarily meant to distinguish the training available to those who have already embarked on an academic/research career (who Earley, 2014, usefully identifies as *producers* of research) from (for example) students of research methods delivered on taught degrees (identified as *consumers* of research, Earley, 2014). There has been Higher Education Academy and

Researcher Development Initiative research on undergraduate research, but little on the advanced.

Our research builds upon a prior year-long study (as presented by Kilburn et al., to SRHE in 2013) which used mixed methods to engaged UK methods specialists, teachers and early career methods learners in exploring the distinctive pedagogical challenges faced by methods teachers and learners (see Kilburn et al., 2014a, 2014b). Our current work extends this foundation and comprises three components: expert panel interviews and focus groups; a research methods diary circle focused on researchers learning journeys; and case studies of innovation in pedagogy and method using interviews, observations and documents in an iterative process.

In this paper, we discuss insights gained from our expert panel approach (adapted from Galliers and Haung, 2012). Convened in summer 2015, we consulted 13 international specialists in methods development and the teaching thereof across mixed, qualitative and quantitative methods in social sciences. Themes arising from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with experts led to an online follow-up exchange of views on these themes, moving discussion from an individual to a community level. Specifically we wanted to explore particular challenges posed by the teaching advanced methods, the forms of pedagogical content knowledge (see Shulman, 1986) involved, and the role of innovations in both methodologies and in teaching and learning practice.

Expert interviews offered us the opportunity to develop an understanding of wider issues shaping the debate on methods teaching and how these influence classroom practices and learner experience. We know that learning, including teachers' pedagogical learning is situated social practice (Korthagen, 2010). Where and how we learn to teach methods is important for understanding both methods and pedagogic cultures. Expert interviews suggest that learning as teachers of research methods has been situated in very different sociocultural contexts. These roots of teachers' pedagogic approaches are found to inform teaching and learning in distinct, and geo-politically, specific ways. In addition, the hegemony of Western research practice is raised, along with tensions between international credentialism (the need for research methods training as an international, dis-located, currency that is standard across borders) and situated scholarship that addresses pressing local and indigenous concerns. For specialists working globally, the challenge of engaging students in diverse research cultures, research traditions and power-relations meant a constant attention and sensitivity to the learners' context in a relationship that expands the notion of teacher/researcher into that of learner/teacher/researcher.

We find that placing the learner, and teacher-as-learner at the centre of pedagogy demands a socio-cultural frame that recognises the situated nature of teaching and learning. This suggests that there can be no universal response to the challenges evoked by the teaching of advanced research methods. To understand methods teaching from a socio-cultural perspective, as highlighted in our international interviews, is to recognise at the same time that the context of methods teaching is both political, geo-political and deeply contextual.

To this end, our paper will argue for a move beyond instrumentalist, 'what works' accounts of research methods teaching, to instead develop a space in which methods teaching and learning at the local, national and international level is understood as a complex process that is situated. This affords new insights, for example, on the positionality of methods, and the nature of innovations which are crossing boundaries and geographic borders, as well as disciplines.

SHRE 2015 is themed around converging concepts in global higher education research, with an impetus to consider local, national and international perspectives as converging and distinct contexts. In response, this paper will offer insights that reflect upon the complex dynamics and geo-political socio-cultural factors that shape pedagogy as it is specified, enacted and experienced (Nind, Curtin and Hall, forthcoming).

Crucially, and in-line with our commitment to engaging with, rather than researching on, the communities concerned – our presentation will engage Conference delegates in a critical dialogue regarding our emergent findings and broader questions regarding the emergence of nascent pedagogic culture(s) in a global context.

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