

Introduction

Towards a Pedagogical Culture in Research Methods

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This book arose from a recognition on the part of the editors of our great ignorance about the teaching of research methods in the social sciences. Despite, between us, having taught the subject in some form or other over more than two decades at eight universities in six countries, we were aware of many questions about what and how we should teach it – and a disconcerting lack of anywhere to turn for answers. Aside from one or two immediate colleagues, we were working in isolation from what must be a very large number of fellow academics around the world who are engaged in the same educational endeavour. In the absence of a professional association or a body of literature devoted to research methods pedagogy, we decided to take the initiative by bringing together a collection of writings on the topic aimed at academics who teach research methods at the tertiary level, researchers, scholars and academic peers. The book is not intended for the textbook, practitioner or policymaker market. We created a web page and called for contributions. The enthusiastic response – we received well over 60 proposals as well as innumerable encouraging comments – showed that there are many others in the field who share our concerns. Clearly the time is right for a thorough examination of research methods education.

As far as methodology was concerned, earlier generations of research students (among whom we number ourselves and no doubt many of our fellow contributors) were generally flying in the dark. They were either told to follow a specified line of enquiry (or left to pick up methodological skills as and when they could) in the process of doing their research. Those who were fortunate had supervisors who initiated them into the research process through a sort of apprenticeship. Otherwise, they had to rely on what they could glean from books on methodology, research reports and *ad hoc* methodological seminars. The notion that research methods could or should be a subject in the curriculum (let alone a compulsory subject) was largely unknown.

The contemporary situation, in many parts of the world, is very different. Under pressure to increase enrolments and improve completion rates among research students, universities have begun stressing the importance of a sound training in how to conduct research. Research methodology, whether discipline-specific or generic, is now a component of most postgraduate, as well as a number of undergraduate, programmes. However, the status and function of these programmes

vary widely. The research methods component may be anything from a short series of seminars or workshops to courses that run for a semester, a year or even over several years. Attendance may be optional or compulsory. Assessment differs too: simply attending may be enough to ensure a pass or the courses may include a full range of assignments that are graded on a par with all other programme components. Such variation may be inevitable and even desirable, but it should not be left to occur by default. It is one of many issues that research methods teachers need to consider evaluate and debate. We believe it is time to develop what might be termed a 'pedagogical culture' relating to research methods. By this we refer to the exchange of ideas within a climate of systematic debate, investigation and evaluation surrounding all aspects of teaching and learning in the subject.

We would have liked it to be possible for this initial publication in research methods pedagogy simply to consolidate the field by drawing on a rich literature of pedagogical theory and research. But, apart from a few isolated publications, there is as yet no body of work or even a generally accepted approach, around which a pedagogical culture can develop. Our ambition for this book has therefore had to be modest. It is intended to be a small but essential preliminary step towards developing such a pedagogical culture, by enabling teachers in different countries and within a variety of disciplines to establish the extent to which there are common concerns and challenges, and to demonstrate some ways in which they are being met. Since this book appears to be the first in English (and perhaps any language) to address research methods teaching as an important pedagogical interest, we feel it is premature to argue for or against a particular approach to methods teaching. Our aim is to start, as it were, a lot farther back: to raise awareness of the issues and to provide both a stimulus and some source materials for more substantial and systematic future work in the field. The chapters were selected on the basis that they deal with important topics, not because the writers espoused a given ideology or followed a given line of argument.

Our aim throughout has been to address pedagogical issues from the perspective of concepts and principles, rather than to adopt an approach of 'this is what I do in my classroom and this is how you can do it'. A fundamental assumption for the development of a pedagogical culture is that there are skills, knowledge and processes required for teaching a subject that are related to, but distinguishable from, expertise in the subject itself. This has long been recognized in a number of traditional disciplines, where a pedagogical culture, manifested in formal organizations and informal networks, conferences and publications, dedicated to teaching, has developed in parallel with the discipline itself. In fields as diverse as history and mathematics, there is a strong academic tradition of discipline-related pedagogy. Applied linguistics originated when language teachers began to scrutinize their own practice in the light of advances in theoretical linguistics (Corder, 1973) and has since become a vigorous academic discipline in its own right (McDonough, 2002).

By contrast, research methods education has scarcely begun to take shape as a field of academic endeavour. In certain respects the current status of research

methods teaching is akin to the situation obtaining a decade or two ago in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (ES/FL) or of what has been variously styled as academic skills, academic literacy or study skills. When these activities first appeared on the academic scene, they were regarded as simply support or service activities. They occupied a marginal place within university education and were typically taught by junior or sessional staff. There was little interest in, or incentive for, a pedagogical culture to develop around them. Under pressure from a rapidly expanding intake of students from non-traditional and mixed ability backgrounds, however, university managers began to recognize that these subjects have an essential role to play in maintaining standards and retention rates. They were gradually incorporated into the mainstream of academic programmes (Garner et al., 1995), and the teaching of both academic skills and ES/FL is now widely accepted as a significant academic pursuit. As a consequence, a lively pedagogical culture has developed around them, manifested in dedicated professional associations. Theoretical and methodological debates are conducted through national and international conferences, and specialist journals provide an outlet and a stimulus for a growing body of research (Lillis, 2001). Each field now offers a career structure for academics who wish to specialize within it.

A similar upgrading process is, or soon will be, under way with research methods, as it comes to occupy a more central place within academic programmes. The earlier piecemeal, trial and error, acquisition of research skills by a small handful of research students is being superseded by structured coursework. Government and university bodies are calling for the extensive, systematic teaching of research methods to all postgraduate students, as well as to trainee practitioners in a number of fields (QAA, 2004). The academic status of the subject is still not secure in many institutions, as is evidenced by differing views about who should be given the responsibility of teaching it. Where it is regarded as little more than introducing students to some basic information and skills, the task may be given to a junior member of staff or perhaps a current doctoral student. Where methodology is regarded as an essential but rather abstract pursuit, the teaching may be left to more experienced faculty members with a 'methodological cast of mind'. Of course, members of either group can be excellent teachers of research and both are represented among the authors in this book. Early career researchers often display a fresh enthusiasm for research and an inventiveness in their teaching, while senior academics can bring a depth of wisdom and breadth of perspective that make their research methods classes lively learning experiences for their students. But the outcomes are just as likely to be less than optimal. Junior staff may lack perspective and self-confidence; senior staff may be inflexible in their conception of research. In either case, the subject will not be taught as well as it might be. In any discipline, neither showing potential and enthusiasm nor, conversely, having a long record of research will itself make a good teacher. Both characteristics might be said to be a valuable but not a sufficient condition for the effective research methods teacher. Until research methods itself is accepted as central to students' education in a discipline, and a passion for research and ability

in teaching it as a *sine qua non* for research methods tutors, students are unlikely to learn how to do research well.

It is only through the development of a pedagogical culture that excellence in teaching research methods can be encouraged and ensured. It is essential for those of us engaged in this field to work together to establish such a culture, to ensure that our collective work develops into an academic and pedagogical undertaking of a high standard. This is, as we said, the intention of this first collection of writings on the topic. The form and orientation of the book have been determined by the inchoate nature of the field. Our approach in selecting the various contributions has been deliberately eclectic, to give as wide a view as possible within the limitations of a single volume of the present state of the art. From its inception some four years ago, we have tried to ensure that this book would be more like a collegial discussion than a lecture; a conversation that reflects original and new insights into the pedagogy of research through the editors' choice of the contributions. By including a wide range of shorter chapters, we have tried to achieve a relatively broad conspectus of current practice as the basis for further conceptualization of what research methods education can become. We also aimed for as wide as practicable a representation of views. The editors are from three different continents, and contributions are included from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States. The disciplines represented include anthropology, education, nursing, psychology, social work and sociolinguistics. The authors include both senior, experienced researchers and early career academics teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

We attempted to maintain coherence among this variety of perspectives and approaches by asking authors to emphasize those aspects of their work that are likely to be of interest to research methods teachers within any social science and in any university and to relate general principles and specific examples, conceptual discussion and classroom applications. There are, of course, points of variation, even discrepancy, between the positions adopted. This is desirable in an initial publication in the field, if only to reflect the enormous range of experience and practice among current teachers. After reviewing the received abstracts and requesting draft chapters from selected authors, the preliminary review process began with our comments as editors on the ideas presented via personal communication with the authors. When we were satisfied with the draft product the publisher put the ideas through a rigorous blind peer review process. All the chapters were sent to three reviewers (two in the UK and one in the US) who are experts in the field of research methodology and pedagogy for a thorough appraisal. Comments and suggestions received from the reviewers were considered and implemented. Once the revisions were submitted to the publisher another round of blind peer reviews was undertaken. We hope that readers will form their own opinions and use whatever academic forum they can find to engage in debate with the writers.

No collection of this size can be truly comprehensive, of course. We have had to take editorial decisions that mean that some aspects of the field are not as well covered as might be desired. Since there is already a sizeable literature on the teaching of statistics in particular, and to an extent quantitative research methods in general, we decided to place the focus largely (although not exclusively) on the more disparate and less widely discussed matters which concern qualitative research or which transcend the quantitative–qualitative division. Even so, there are obvious gaps. A number of methodological and pedagogical topics are given insufficient coverage, either because of editorial decisions or because no relevant contributions could be obtained. They include the relative merits of generic and discipline-specific research methods courses – a topic that surely merits a book of its own – the similarities and differences between undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and the optimal time that should be allocated to them.

Organizing such a wide-ranging collection of writings has inevitably been a challenge. After much discussion and experiment, we decided to follow a pattern that roughly reflects a process of gradually establishing a pedagogical culture. Starting with more general historical and philosophical matters, the sections focus on increasingly specific pedagogical issues. A historical perspective reminds us that, in building a pedagogical culture, we are not starting from scratch or designing courses *ex nihilo*. Research methods have been taught for long enough to enable today's teachers to learn something from earlier debates and experiments, and perhaps to avoid repeating some earlier mistakes. This history has not been examined to any great extent to date, but the two chapters in the Historical Perspectives section represent a valuable start on what should become a fruitful field of investigation. Peden and Carroll document changes in the psychology curriculum at the national level in the United States that have occurred in response to evolving views of the scientific and cultural status of the discipline in that country. A more personal reflection on 30 years of teaching educational research, also in the United States, is given by Preissle and Roulston. These two historical surveys are complementary, not only because they examine different disciplines from different perspectives but also because they bring into focus the predominantly quantitative orientation of one with the predominantly qualitative concerns of the other. The concluding remark by Preissle and Roulston, 'we continue to watch, listen and learn', could serve as a catchphrase for what we hope will become a growing area of interest in the history of research pedagogy – and indeed, for all of the sections in the book.

The Approaches to the Curriculum section opens with Kawulich's discussion of the role of theory in high-quality research. Drawing on her own experience, and the substantial literature, she poses a series of key pedagogical questions, such as: what is the relationship of theory to practice; are theories discipline-specific; and how do theories affect choice of methods? Some of her answers are likely to receive general agreement from other teachers; others may stimulate fruitful debate. Maree examines fundamental questions relating to epistemology in research. He deconstructs some common assumptions prevalent among students of research methods (and, at times, among their teachers), for instance, that experimental

methods are *ipso facto* positivist. Against the background of an exposition of alternative epistemologies, such as positivism and social constructionism, he introduces critical realism as a means of transcending their shortcomings and as a basis for both quantitative and qualitative social science research. He also provides valuable advice on teaching research from a critical realist perspective.

The philosophical (epistemological and ontological) choices underlying curriculum design in research methods courses are also the focus of the contribution by Wagner and Okeke. They argue that curriculum choices should not be determined by an unnecessary dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Their own research, in South Africa and Nigeria, shows how choices between methodologies are too often ill informed and conclude that students should be equipped to make their own methodological decisions in the light of the epistemological and pragmatic issues surrounding any given study.

Since every context in which research methods courses are run has its own distinctive features, there would be limited value in providing a sort of catalogue of specific degree programmes or courses in various institutions around the world. For those who would find such information helpful, the Internet is a ready resource. Nonetheless, instances of programmes that are structured around important pedagogical principles can serve as instructive examples. The chapter by Pascal and Brown well exemplifies the way in which issues of epistemology and ontology, discussed in depth in the preceding chapters, can be incorporated into the design of a degree sequence, rather than treated as discrete elements. (A similar function is performed for assessment in the chapter by Ward et al.: see below.) Pascal and Brown describe how a programme can incrementally develop students' capacity to build research competence on the basis of a good understanding of epistemological and ontological principles. As well as outlining the philosophy behind their approach, they include examples of class exercises, which can serve as a useful resource of the kind called for in much of the correspondence we received in response to our call for contributions. A further characteristic of their chapter is that it is presented through the individual voices of two early career academics. As we mentioned above, the teaching of methods is frequently allocated to younger staff members who may feel that they lack the knowledge and experience to fulfil the task adequately. We hope that this chapter will be a source of encouragement to such people and as an example for experienced teachers of the sort of creativity that fresh minds can bring to curriculum design as well as to classroom teaching.

The remaining two chapters in this section concern the importance of including in the curriculum a good grounding in the social interaction involved in research. Garner and Sercombe present a simple model of relationship types that has proved a useful heuristic helping students reflect on how they relate to the participants in their research. Given that the quality of data and the most appropriate means of analysing them are influenced – sometimes crucially so – by the relationships established between researcher and researched, the authors contend that a social relations perspective is an essential component of methods courses in the social sciences. One aspect of social relations that is included in many courses is research

ethics. In her survey of how the topic is taught, McAuliffe identifies four approaches (or five, if one includes the view that ethics simply cannot be taught). Three of these treat the topic as a discrete element within the course, to be given more or less detailed treatment. The fourth, which she advocates, is to see the ethical dimension 'as a foundational part of the research process' and one that therefore 'needs to be incorporated as a key element in research training and education'. She provides a stage-by-stage discussion of the implication of ethical decisions in the design and conduct of a project, which will be of great value to anyone wishing to learn how to develop this essential awareness among students.

The third section, *Approaches to Developing Research Competence*, comprises a number of chapters dealing with the more general knowledge, skills and competencies that students need to develop if they are to do good research. Based on the view that research is a series of decision-making processes, Earley presents a framework for developing students as 'reflective researchers'. Three learning outcomes are identified: first, that students will be able to describe themselves as researchers in the context of the larger research community; second, that they will understand how reflection links all stages of research; third, that they will keep a journal. In achieving these goals, they learn both the 'science' and the 'art' of research. In his chapter, Roth writes from the perspective of teaching research as praxis, which aims to obviate the problem encountered by many graduates who find that what they learned about in their methods classes does not prepare them for actually doing research in the real world. Having expounded the theoretical bases of this approach, Roth examines the many complex demands of teaching graduate researchers through a form of 'apprenticeship', using a particular project as a case study. He shows how, rather than attempting to introduce the students to a pre-existing research culture, this approach sees teacher and learner of research as constituents in an evolving culture, which each shapes as much as he or she is shaped by it.

Strayhorn's chapter is an all too rare example of research into methods education (Wagner and Okeke also draw on their own fieldwork in their more theoretically-oriented chapter). Using a self-report questionnaire, he examined the type and frequency of teaching strategies used in methods courses and their perceived effectiveness for students' learning. He found that the two most frequently used strategies (lectures and reading textbooks) were rated least effective, while other less commonly used strategies (such as article critique) were rated highly. He discusses the implications of the findings for the development of effective pedagogy and suggests ways in which more innovative teaching can be developed. Although the sample size was too small to allow for definitive conclusions about such influences as ethnicity and gender, the findings are sufficiently suggestive to point to some directions for important future research.

Another aspect of research methods education that has received too little systematic attention in the literature is the use of computers. Yet, as Nunes points out, computers are transforming our conceptions of how research is conducted, as well as opening up new fields of enquiry that were until quite recently unthinkable.

He writes, 'to conduct research in [many fields] without the use of computers is almost impossible'. This applies equally to quantitative and qualitative studies, which can be effectively integrated with the intelligent use of appropriate software. His chapter provides a brief outline of some of the resources available, either as special packages or through the Internet, together with some practical ways of incorporating the use of technology in all stages of a methods course. In the rapidly changing world of information technology, it is inevitable that such chapters will need to be constantly updated and revised.

The nature and role of assessing students' learning in research methods courses vary widely. In more well-established disciplines, there are 'default' methods of assessment (such as the academic essay and a portfolio of work), but there is no such method in this field. It is therefore an area of challenge and opportunity, but, as Ward, Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Snow comment, assessment is too often treated as a final, add-on item in a curriculum, rather than being an integrated part that helps to enhance learning and motivation. The writers present an example of the use of a wide range of options in a four-year undergraduate programme. Although, in the shorter postgraduate courses in which much research methods teaching occurs, the full scope and extent of their strategies may not be practicable, their detailed discussion of the theoretical issues and the practicalities of their application should be a source of information and inspiration to teachers at all levels.

The fourth section includes chapters dealing with approaches to teaching particular methodologies. It would, of course, be impossible to treat all of the methodologies that are included in courses. Furthermore, particularly in qualitative research, methodology is evolving rapidly. The contributions given here represent a small sample of the range of possibilities and challenges raised by the need to ensure that students develop not only a knowledge of very different methodologies, but more importantly a grasp of the principles underlying them. The selection of exemplary discussions in this section will, we hope, make the goal of developing reflective researchers (as defined in Earley's Chapter 9) more achievable.

Taylor writes about the particular demands of teaching participatory research methodology. Participatory research is based on the premise that 'people know and are capable of identifying and sharing issues [and] analysing and learning from their analysis'. It transcends the traditional distinction between researcher and researched, and helps to avoid the problem of research that answers theoretical questions while leaving unaddressed the real-world problems that gave rise to them. Taylor highlights the motivational effects that engaging with participants can have on students. He also stresses the difficulties: this type of research depends on a degree of self-confidence and maturity of the researcher as well as a grasp of the relationship between concept and practice. There are clear connections here with the social relations approach advocated by Garner and Sercombe.

Practitioners in many fields are increasingly required to acquire research skills as part of their professional education and training. Nguyen and Lam address the particular demands of teaching these students, who may fail to see the relevance of

learning how to do research. They discuss a range of ineffective teaching strategies and present alternatives that have proved to be more effective. Like several other authors, they emphasize the importance of adopting a collaborative approach to teaching that takes full cognizance of the students' misconceptions and fears about the subject.

Case study is a common methodology in many of the human sciences, but it is one that is not easy to teach well. Students all too often regard case studies as nothing more than a fallback to be used if the sample population is too small for other more 'substantial' methods. Zucker's chapter demonstrates that case study is a well-developed methodology with a substantial theoretical base and distinctive data gathering and analytical techniques. She describes how rigorous case studies can be designed and implemented, illustrating each point with reference to the investigation of patients with coronary heart disease. Liu and Carspecken give a similarly thorough examination of critical ethnography. They focus on how to maintain a symmetry between curriculum and pedagogy, which is important in all teaching but particularly so in relation to this particular methodology, in which 'the curriculum is the pedagogy'. The principles that guide classroom interactions must reflect and reinforce those of the methodology itself. The authors discuss symmetries of, amongst others, design, relationships and power, and also identify two inevitable asymmetries which must be openly addressed with the students if the methodology is to be successfully learned.

The final section comprises two chapters that address an aspect of growing relevance to research methods education, but one that has as yet been little investigated, namely, the pedagogy of non-traditional students. Grundy and McGinn are, respectively, a student with a hearing disability and her supervisor. Their collaboration in teaching and learning exemplifies how, through sensitive collaboration, the difficulties that students with disabilities encounter in developing research skills not only can be avoided or overcome, but can lead to new breakthroughs in methodology that have potentially wider application. In the final chapter, Flores Farfán, Garner and Kawulich outline some of the challenges of teaching the increasing numbers of students whose epistemologies differ significantly from those that dominate the research paradigm of most methods courses. 'International' students from African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and South American societies (for example), as well as indigenous and immigrant minorities within Western societies, bring to their studies a range of alternative, sometimes fundamentally different, ways of viewing education and knowledge. This raises crucial pedagogical questions. Is the goal of our research methods courses to inculcate these students into the Western paradigm (see Preissle and Roulston, Chapter 1)? Is all research culturally relative? Given the present state of our knowledge (or ignorance), the answers to these questions have to be largely anecdotal. The authors discuss a number of illustrative examples of their own experience in an attempt to identify the issues, address some of the cultural pitfalls and enrich the pedagogy through creative incorporation of alternative epistemological and pragmatic concerns. This section barely scratches the surface

of the issues raised by the increasing presence of non-traditional students in research methods courses; this is an area of investigation that offers enormous potential in our quest for a pedagogical culture within research methods.

We have repeatedly expressed our ambition that this collection will serve as a jumping-off point, and an encouragement to the many colleagues who are involved in research methods teaching to develop networks, share ideas, clarify issues and engage in debate. We hope that this will begin to happen at all levels: institutional; local; national; and international. There has inevitably been a great deal of hard work demanded of all the contributors to bring this volume to fruition and we have been greatly impressed by the willingness of all to produce drafts and to rewrite them in response to our editorial suggestions, within tight deadlines. In our dealings with all contributors we have met with enthusiasm and encouragement. A high level of collegiality and collaboration are necessary for a pedagogical culture within research methods to develop, and our experience in editing this book convinces us that the prospects for the future in this regard are very bright.