**Project title:** Infusing research-mindedness in a Psychology Honours module

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## Statement of the problem

I have been teaching research methods modules at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels since 2003. I usually emphasize that it is not only what students know but how they come to know it. Thus, the research module brings into focus a reliance on an evidentiary base to support claims to truth in psychology. Yet, I have encountered various barriers to teaching research methods.

First, some psychology students do not understand the need to study methodology. Second, some students are dismayed at having to take compulsory modules in research methods. Third, for some students, scientific thinking is inappropriately applied to psychology. Fourth, there is sometimes skepticism about whether psychological experiences can and should be measured. Fifth, methodology and ideology are seen to coincide by some students and even academics.

The aim of my project therefore, was to develop an approach to teaching research methods that engages with these barriers and convinces students that research methods is integral to learning about psychology and can be interesting and fun. At the same time, research methods is not apolitical. Like science, it is contextually embedded and influenced by history, power, and material conditions. My aim was thus, to negotiate the barriers identified above and bring into focus how technical knowledge of research methods can be applied in the service of a greater social good.

## Processes to address the problem

Until 2019 my research methods module involved upfront teaching, class discussion, role play to demonstrate interviewing skills, and in-class demonstration of data analysis as a practical component. In 2020 and 2021 there was much upheaval due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced many lecturers to change the way they think about and implement their teaching. From March 2020 teaching and evaluation took place exclusively online. In 2022 my students were back in class, which made it possible to use a broad range of approaches to teaching research methods. The module thus took the form of student presentations, Powerpoint slides with voice-over presented on SUNLearn, and in-class discussions. It was essentially a flipped classroom approach that evolved from the Covid-19 years. SUNLearn is Stellenbosch University's Learning Management System and is the core online platform for learning, teaching and assessment.

I introduced an integrated approach to facilitate learning and foster research-mindedness among the psychology honours students. The methods of engaging students were student presentations, an extensive use of SUNLearn to communicate and share resources including video clips that I created, and class discussions that in some instances involved going a bit off topic in class.

## Powerpoint presentations with voice over on SUNLearn

I prepared a set of Powerpoint slides with voice-over for each weekly class. The topics that were covered were: Introduction to qualitative methods, Differences between quantitative research and qualitative research, Participant recruitment, Collecting qualitative data, Ethical considerations in research, Analysing qualitative data, Preparing a qualitative research report, Mixed methods, and How to review a journal article.

In addition to the Powerpoint slides, I had also created a set of video clips in which I demonstrated an approach to coding and analysing qualitative data. I used a transcript of a qualitative interview that I had conducted as the data to be coded. In the demonstration I used a highlighter to identify salient phrases, clauses and sentences; a pair of scissors to cut these out; and glue to arrange and stick the cuttings into groups which formed the basis of the codes which then constituted the themes for the thematic analysis. The video clips demonstrating this method were loaded on to SUNLearn so that students could use it as a model for their own data analysis project.

Students' first port of call with the module material was on SUNLearn, where they viewed the Powerpoint slides and video clips that I had prepared. The use of SUNLearn saved much time because face-to-face class time could now be used for discussion rather than upfront teaching. I also used SUNLearn to share podcasts, readings, and Youtube clips that related to issues that we had discussed in class.

## Student presentations

I assigned students to groups and gave each group a topic to present in class. I also gave each group a list of possible readings to draw on when preparing their presentations. The topics they were assigned were falsification, operational definitions, induction and deduction, sampling and participant recruitment, interview and focus group discussions, grounded theory, interpretive phenomenological analysis, research with children, ethics, and important areas of research in South Africa. Students were encouraged to reflect on the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods in their presentations.

The groups did the usual Powerpoint presentations which they sent to me before class so that I could check them and post them on SUNLearn. However, they also included in their presentations some innovative approaches such as a court room drama, a focus group and feedback session, short video clips, and a skit. For example, the courtroom drama involved, with some humour, putting a focus group discussion on trial to determine its worth as a technique of data collection.

## Class discussions

A class discussion followed the presentation that was made each week. Class work involved up front teaching, small group discussions and report-back, and role-playing qualitative interviewing and conducting a focus group discussion. Also, participation was a large component of the class discussion, and my job was to facilitate debate and discussion between class members.

<u>The class assignment</u>

A major component of the module was the class assignment which involved students conducting a qualitative research interview with a participant, transcribing the data, and then coding and analyzing the transcription as I had demonstrated in the video clips I had produced. The assignment required students to write a report on the data they analyzed. They thus obtained experience in scientific report-writing.

**Achievements:**

An important achievement was that considerable time was saved by making the course materials available asynchronously on SUNLearn, which students could access asynchronously and at their convenience. As such, students were required to engage with the module both online as well as in class.

Class discussions were spirited, and students participated with enthusiasm and vigour. Many stated that research methods had become their favourite honours module. Class discussions had broad implications for understanding key debates and issues pertaining to research and research methodology.

Students also learned specific technical skills, such as how to develop an operational definition of a psychological construct, how to reason empirically, how to differentiate between falsifiable and non-falsifiable statements, how to ask an answerable qualitative and quantitative research question, how to conceptualize and plan participant recruitment, how to construct a qualitative interview schedule, how to collect qualitative data using interviews and focus group discussions, data transcription, how to code and analyse qualitative data, and how to write up a qualitative research report.

**Processes to achieve the output**

I also conducted a mid-term assessment of the module by asking students to write qualitative comments about their experiences in the module. Some students indicated that they did not like going off topic during class discussions and instead would have preferred the discussion to remain on point. Some students indicated that they would have preferred the same theme to be maintained between the SUNLearn powerpoint presentations and class discussions. These remain matters for consideration although the content of the module would be much more limited in scope if such a suggestion were implemented.

I made my institutional presentation on 3 June 2022 on MS Teams. Members of the audience consisted of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Teaching and Learning Advisor, my head of department, the module convenor, a colleague who had been awarded a teaching fellowship at Stellenbosch University, and a student from a previous year. Others had been invited but were unable to attend.

After making my presentation I invited comments from the audience. The comments were largely positive and included the following:

- That the fact that students were being forced to think about the course material prior to coming to class was important and useful

- That the innovative intervention had the potential to change the way students think about psychology
- That the innovative intervention was based on sound pedagogical principles
- That students generally do not enjoy interacting in class but the structure of the module forced them to do so creatively and innovatively
- That there is potential for generating lifelong learning skills with the intervention
- That the innovative intervention required some adjustment from students in the way they engaged with course materials
- That learning can and often does occur in a space of discomfort as long as students feel safe
- That storytelling and sharing the lecturer's own experiences in class have the potential to capture the imagination of students
- That participatory methods are often effective ways to teach research methods

The discussion also extended to the nature of teaching research methods in general. There was agreement that psychology students often experience difficulty with research methods, its relevance, and its application in the discipline. There was also agreement that careful and more detailed scaffolding needs to occur at the undergraduate level so that students are well-prepared for the honours level module that I teach. Often students think that the only career in psychology is clinical psychology. The module has the potential to expose students to the range of intellectual experiences that psychology offers.

One question I received at the institutional presentation was why this innovation did not occur earlier, i.e. in previous years. The answer is that writing the TAU application forced me to think creatively about ways to innovate in the area of teaching. The consequence of the TAU programme in my case is an innovative intervention in my research methods module. Its legacy is a remodeled course that can potentially influence the undergraduate teaching curriculum in research methods in our department.

The success of the class discussions depends to some extent on the skill of the lecturer to ensure everyone is heard in class, not only those who have good verbal English skills. It also requires students to have read the materials and be prepared prior to coming to class. If not, the nature of the class discussions would lack intellectual depth.

The legacy I will leave will be the new module in research methods which will include Powerpoint presentations with voice over on SUNLearn, student presentations, class discussions, and the class assignment. I intend this legacy of fostering research mindedness to remain after I leave the university.