

Introduction



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This publication is a product of the ESRC [National Centre for Research Methods Pedagogy Network](#) (NCRM). The aims of the network are to:

- develop a coordinated picture of researchers interested in researching and developing research methods teaching and learning in the UK and internationally
- connect those researchers with each other and NCRM
- support and amplify 'close-to-practice' research (small-scale local research based on problems in practice, applying critical thinking and use of evidence in developing practice)
- build the pedagogic culture in research methods education and training by enhancing awareness of and connections to each other's work.

The NCRM Pedagogy Network is an example of the growing awakening of the need to build the pedagogic culture around how research methods teaching and learning has distinct challenges and signature pedagogies. In celebration of this, the editors of this work, network members Melanie Nind, Rachel Shanks, Yenn Lee and Jo Edson Ferrie, came together to develop a free-to-download resource as a celebration of the way in which NCRM has succeeded in getting us talking about research methods pedagogy. We worked with an advisory group from the network (Nicole Brown, Jackie Carter, Jo Rose and Christina Silver) from the beginning of this process. We wrote to members of our network and to nominated members of their networks, saying:

As a methods teacher or someone who has been engaged in research or scholarship in this arena, we want to know one teaching tactic or task that you would you want to share with other methods teachers (and learners) and why.

What is it that you do that enables social science research methods learners to 'get it' – to cross a conceptual threshold or have a lightbulb moment?

Why do you do it this way and how does it help?

We explained that the co-created output of these curated contributions would become a resource for other methods teachers in the social sciences and beyond. This is in addition to other outputs from the NCRM Pedagogy Network such as a major [Handbook](#) and other outputs available from [NCRM Resources for trainers](#).

We pointed potential contributors to the NCRM review paper created by Sarah Baker and Rosalind Edwards that has in part inspired this project: [how many interviews.pdf](#). That much downloaded and cited resource was produced in response to the key question 'how many interviews are enough?' and authors' contributions showed the range of positions on this as they made their thinking on this less tacit and more shared. We also chose to have one key question which was: **How do you spark those 'aha' lightbulb moments in research methods learning?**

We are deeply indebted to all the contributors who engaged so enthusiastically with the task we set them. We explained that we did not want this to be an arduous task, rather we wanted this to be a celebration of their research methods teaching. The people who shared reflections from their classroom demonstrate a passion for teaching research methods that is infectious. Having had the privilege of editors' preview, there are ideas and activities here that we have already incorporated into our own teaching.

As well as exposition-based teaching about research methods, there are contributions that show how this teaching is done through active and experiential learning with students taking part in data collection, data analysis or being a research participant. This resource shows how research methods are brought alive by methods teachers in order to engage students and help them come to their own 'aha' moments when they understand what was eluding them and can see how to proceed with their own research project. In this way it is as much a useful read for methods learners as it is for methods teachers.

Four thematic clusters emerged from the contributions, and we have organised the collection accordingly. We begin with *Supporting learners' understanding through metaphors*. We explicitly stated in our initial communication with potential contributors that we aimed 'to gather

some metaphors that help communicate a concept as well as activities and processes'. There are two cooking metaphors in this section with cookbooks and cooking techniques as well as a perpetual stew. We have research methods as pine and oak trees, a social research toolbox and a political party metaphor too.

The first paper from Cristian Dogaru beautifully sets the scene for research methods teaching and the papers that follow. Cristian's paper sets out how he aims to create the 'aha' moment for learners needing to understand that methodology is not a long list of methods or techniques but the theoretical rationale for each choice and their sequence and fit. He likens methodology to a cookbook and methods with culinary techniques such as chopping, boiling and blending.

In the second paper, Kirsty Ken English shares her metaphor relating social research to a toolbox with a plan, the raw data as components to bring together, methods as tools to apply, and interpretation as the final product. Kirsty takes us through teaching all the stages of the research process from literature review to dissemination. She also addresses learners' anxiety and emotions, which is somewhat a recurring theme across the contributions.

The third contribution is by Rossana Perez del Aguila sharing a novel approach to explain the concept of 'paradigm', introducing interpretivism and positivism through right and left-wing political ideologies. This allows students to come to a better understanding of their own and others' paradigm positions through critical reflection on the two traditional paradigms.

Fourth, we have Jo Edson Ferrie and Thees F. Spreckelsen and a nature metaphor to engage students in methods learning. Here the oak tree is a metaphor for qualitative methods, and the pine tree represents quantitative methods. Read the paper to find out how the metaphors develop to support learners.

The fifth paper brings us back round to cooking where we began. Here Yenn Lee shares the 'perpetual stew' of research writing. Yenn shows how research writing can be presented to learners as a continuous process with its own cycle of writing, feedback, revision, and further feedback until it is ready to be submitted (eaten) and how every piece of writing is the basis for the next writing.

In the second section, *Supporting learners to 'get it' using active, experiential or immersive learning*, we have grouped together contributions that provide exercises that the contributing methods teachers use with learners, and we start with food to begin with.

The sixth paper sees Jo Rose explain how using a 'world café' or a carousel of group activities gives learners the opportunity to reflect on participation in different group-based data generation methods. As well as an explanation of the usefulness of this approach, she provides examples of the group methods she uses - creative collage, active listening and group interview.

The seventh contribution comes from Alasdair Jones and Melanie Nind who bring together two examples of workshops on thematic analysis. In Alasdair's workshop, students begin experiencing thematic analysis by using real interview data, while in Melanie's workshop, students use (pictures of) shoes to begin coding, grouping and theming. Having these two workshops side by side shows how differently research methods can be taught while the learning objective is the same.

Next, we have the eighth paper on enacting methodologically grounded qualitative coding via critical use of manual, digital and GenAI tools by Christina Silver. The use of GenAI tools is an area of research methods teaching which is likely to greatly increase. Christina details how learners are given a series of comparative coding exercises to explore the use of different tools while engaging in critical reflection on qualitative coding, where it sits within analytic methods and the role of different tools and processes within it.

From GenAI we turn to ethnography with the ninth contribution by Heather May Morgan focused on bringing ethnography alive in the classroom. Teaching ethnography to mainly applied health sciences postgraduates, Heather 'performs' ethnographic observation while teaching the class. After embodying an ethnographic researcher, she uses further tactics to spark understanding of the nature of ethnography including a joke article and asking the students to consider taken for granted activities such as getting the bus or discussing the weather as an ethnographer might do.

The final paper in Section 2 and our tenth is by Jo Rose about teaching theory-informed research. Jo explains how students are introduced to different theories and then how, working in small groups, students critically evaluate the theory with a set of questions. This exercise

supports students in not only their understanding of criticality but also how each of the theories has differing strengths and purposes.

In Section 3, *Lightbulb moments through creative exploration*, we have a set of contributions that use creative exercises to support students to learn about research methods. If creative activities are not usually your way of teaching, then these contributions may give you the confidence to try something new in your methods teaching.

In Paper 11 from Melanie Nind, we find out about a creative way in which she engages doctoral students in thinking about participatory and emancipatory research. Students work in small groups with sticky notes to complete a diamond 9 ranking of methods of data generation for their participatory potential. This draws students into discussing what it is that makes research inclusive.

In our twelfth contribution, Micol Pizzolati shares a creative way to support students with research questions. Students are asked to make a collage around the theme of 'The story of animals and me' and then spend time discussing what happened to them as they made their collage. Micol provides photographs of some of the collages and discusses what the students' work inspired in terms of a set of questions, showing how using creative practices can open up new ways to think through research ideas.

In the next and thirteenth paper, Nicole Brown, shares an example of learning visual data analysis methods by giving students photographs to analyse and then discussing 'What does this all mean?' She eases them towards the realisation that analysing visual data is within their grasp.

The next contribution, number fourteen, sees Yenn Lee discussing a playful way to teach literature review. This could have also been in the metaphor section but works well here too as a creative way to teach students about how writing and structuring a literature review is like weaving with threads. She shares an exercise in which students work together to 'weave' a disparate collection of movies in a way that makes sense.

The final part of the resource is Section 4 *Learning relationally with peers and others*. This section shares practices that illustrate the power of bringing learners together so that they can create 'aha' moments or spark lightbulbs together with each other.

In our fifteenth contribution Rosalind Edwards shares her structured interview topic guide exercise. She even provides us with a picture of many different lightbulbs from the front cover of the qualitative research methods Masters module guide. Rosalind details how students give, and work with, suggestions for an interview guide on the topic of 'Feelings about Housework', something that everyone can understand but that can also generate different ideas and highlight different understandings of an everyday activity.

The sixteenth paper turns to getting students engaged with quantitative methods through inquiry-based learning and group assessment. This contribution by Jessica Mancuso is an important one as it is the only one that deals solely with quantitative methods. Jessica details how getting students to work together in a group project helps to support them through their feeling that they are not a 'methods' person or a 'stats' person. However, students may also be apprehensive about group work so there are two levels of anxiety to deal with. Jessica shows how these anxieties are overcome and together the students support one another to work as a group and to learn how to query a quantitative dataset.

Next (seventeenth!), Rebecca Johnson addresses sparking integrative thinking across methodological boundaries necessary for learning mixed methods. Rebecca describes a two-day intensive workshop in which she supports postgraduate health science students to develop confidence and creativity for their future mixed methods research. This is done by connecting enquiry and design with the technical foundations of mixed methods, anchoring decisions in the 'why' of their enquiry and linking theory and purpose through exercises that promote active learning, peer collaboration and reflection.

Last, but not least, is the final paper, number 18, 'Emotion: A barrier or a tool in learning methods?' by Jo Edson Ferrie. Several of the other contributions cover emotions but here emotions are front and centre of the piece. Jo shares how they are acknowledged and worked through with students. She argues that we need to spend more time on emotions and talk about emotions in our research methods teaching. As well as understanding the why, what and how of research methods, students need to learn how to work with, and through their emotions, particularly when their data relates to humans. This may feel like a provocation or as something out of place or disruptive when discussing research methods teaching, but as Jo states at the end of the piece 'Learning methods after all, is still learning, and the best learning is disruptive.'

The final contribution offers concluding remarks, drawing together the threads that run between the contributions. This section, by one of the editors, Rachel Shanks, brings together the contributions in a different order and with different themes to the ones in the sections that follow, for example, drawing attention to the contributions that deal with GenAI.

Just as we asked contributors to pass on our request for contributions to others, we also ask you to share this resource. The contributors have sought to pass on what they have learnt from teaching research methods, sharing one thing they do that really helps methods learners to 'get it' and we hope that we have co-produced something of real value in promoting the pedagogic culture in research methods education.