

## Using Metaphor for Big Qual Methods

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**Summary** - Advanced research methods are often taught in short courses to participants from varied disciplinary and methodological traditions. It can be difficult to tailor content to meet the needs of varied (and sometime unknown) groups. In these circumstances, learners can get lost in the detail of a topic, or may not see how it relates to larger goals. By engaging learners' prior knowledge with metaphor, teachers can draw on what learners already know to assist them in grasping the complex systems and processes that characterise advance research methods. Visual metaphors have been found to be particularly useful within quantitative methods, where there is a need to show that a given statistical operation allows users to do something interesting with a given dataset (see Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). For Breadth-and-Depth methods, and archaeological metaphor has been developed (Davidson et al., 2018) to effectively convey a method for big qual analysis.

**Learning Outcome** - Learners quickly grasp and make correct predictions about the functioning of a method, or, in the case of Breadth and Depth method, the methodological instrument/process.

**Rationale** – Engaging prior knowledge

Peer-learning

Inclusion: The diversity of participants can be a challenge. This approach ensures that diversity is recognised and the teacher can pre-empt and respond to this challenge.

Constructivism / learning by doing: learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning-making and knowledge construction, as opposed to passively receiving information.

Scaffolding: the teacher provides sufficient support to help the student master a task of concept that a student is initially unable to grasp independently.

**Level** – advanced quals/quants/mixed-method.

**Setting** – seminar / workshop

**Learning cycles** –

Step 1: Develop a metaphor that is consistent with the topic being taught, and which has the same basic elements that interact in the same way.

Supporting resource: [Live Illustration: Teacher discussion of using metaphors for Big Qual Analysis](#) (pdf). From panel discussion Q&A Big Qual Teaching event, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

Step 2: Introduce the metaphor (visual/verbal) to the class. Where a more complex metaphor is used to articulate the structure of the method, and this in turn structures teaching (as in Breadth and Depth method) maintain a visual reference during teaching (a slide / handout / poster or other visual cue) to allow learners to review the metaphor and locate themselves during teaching.

Supporting resource: Example: [Poster: A 4-Step 'archaeological' process – moving between breadth and depth](#). Example: [Visualisation: Breadth and Depth Method](#) (pdf).

Step 3: Learners undertake initial practical work / discussion, working with the method in light of the metaphor.

Step 4. From this initial point, teachers can then 'back-fill', to flesh out the complexity and detail of the subject, to develop new knowledge.

Step 5: Learners apply new knowledge.

**Designer's Reflection:** Challenges within this approach include designing metaphors that are appropriate for diverse groups (for example, not reliant on a particular cultural background or disciplinary knowledge). Notably, big data has been associated with a number of questionable metaphors, having learners appraise the validity of any given metaphor is an important part of developing critical understanding. For teaching, particularly in advanced methods, a metaphor may be useful for initial introductions, but as expert practice develops and a teacher introduces greater complexity, the metaphor may cease to be useful.

#### **Additional resources and tools –**

[Teaching how to analyse large volumes of secondary qualitative data](#). NCRM Online Resource.

Lewthwaite, S. & Nind, M. (2019) [A typology for research methods teaching development](#). NCRM Online Resource.

Lewthwaite, S., Weller, S., Jamieson, L., Edwards, R. & Nind, M. (2019) [Developing pedagogy for 'Big Qual' methods: teaching how to analyse large volumes of secondary qualitative data](#). NCRM Working Paper.

#### **References -**

Davidson, E., Edwards, R., Jamieson, L. and Weller, S. (2018) Big data, qualitative style: a breadth-and-depth method for working with large amounts of secondary qualitative data. *Quality & Quantity*, 53(1), 363-376.

Lewthwaite, S. and Nind, M. (2016) Teaching research methods in the social science: expert perspectives on pedagogy and practice. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(4), 413-430.

Puschmann, C. and Burgess, J. (2014) Metaphors of big data. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 1690-1709.