Teaching Qualitative Research Methods for Development Studies: Problems, Pedagogies and Best Practices

5th and 6th December 2019
Newnham College, University of Cambridge

Sponsored by the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies and the Development Studies Association

In recent years, debates have surfaced about how to ensure that primary data collection at the undergraduate, masters and doctoral level is conducted in ethical and appropriate ways. Key to this is how research methods for students of development studies are taught. Yet, discussions around the problems, pedagogical approaches and best practices for teaching this are few and far between. While many of those involved in teaching research methods are reasonably sure about the ground they wish to cover, finding the most appropriate and effective ways to teach on these issues, and to ensure that key points move beyond intellectual debates in the seminar room into praxis, is a recurrent challenge. And it is a challenge that often falls on early career researchers, requiring them to combine the limited institutional memory of teaching on this topic with their own innovative takes on the syllabus. Not only does this require a huge investment of time and resources every few years; it also means that improvements in this field of teaching occur only incrementally at a time when the discipline faces important challenges around ethics, inclusion, diversity, representation and impact.

This workshop, a glorified form of academic ‘crowd-sourcing’, is thus designed around discussing prevalent pedagogical challenges within this area of teaching, and sharing ideas about approaches, resources and strategies that have and have not helped address these, and why. Example challenges include how to manage methods classes in an interdisciplinary context in which a diverse range of students possess very different disciplinary backgrounds and levels of knowledge on qualitative and quantitative approaches, and how to determine the balance between teaching people how to be effective consumers of research versus how to conduct research themselves.

As there is almost nothing written on teaching research methods – as opposed to an extensive literature on the nature and ethics of the methods themselves - or how to overcome central dilemmas such as these, the event will necessarily be interactive, user-driven, and oriented towards the co-production of new knowledge and praxis on this topic. Importantly, the workshop is not aimed at producing any kind of standardised curriculum given the inappropriateness of arriving at any form of singular best practice. Through a collaborative approach to knowledge production and appraisal amongst its participants, its goal is to ensure that those teaching research methods for development studies are best positioned to equip their students with responsible and appropriate tools for conducting primary data collection.

Format:

This event will be partially guided by a small number of presentations by invited individuals who have extensive experience teaching research methods in development studies, or who have been involved in pioneering and refining more creative approaches to teaching it. Themes are likely to include:

- Balancing a diverse classroom with extremely varied pre-existing levels of knowledge of qual/quant research methods
- Effective ways to structure a curriculum (including how to strike a balance between teaching on how to appraise existing research, how to design research projects, how to conduct data collection, how to analyse data, etc.)
- Digital techniques and resources for teaching research methods
- Decolonising the teaching of research methods for development studies

Predominantly, however, the programme will involve discussion groups on themes drawn from a short questionnaire that all participants will be asked to complete prior to the workshop. This will ask participants whether they have encountered any recurrent pedagogical challenges in terms of research methods syllabi and teaching, and if they subsequently arrived at any particularly successful, innovative or ineffective ways to overcome these. Individuals may be asked to provide some introductory comments based on their answers. Break-out groups will then be designed around responses and questions drawn from the questionnaire to ensure that, whenever possible, participants are in discussion groups focused around their specific interests and challenges.

**Costs and further details:**

The workshop is free, including lunch, refreshments and dinner on the first night. Attendees will need to cover their own travel and accommodation.

The workshop will be spread over 1.5 days, allowing people to travel to Newnham College on the morning of the first day, and to return after the close of proceedings on the second day.

The workshop is open to academics who have been, are or will be involved in teaching methods for research within development studies, even if not through a specific Development Studies department or course. Attendee numbers will be capped at 35. Should initial interest exceed that, participants will be selected based on their responses to the questionnaire.

The workshop is joint funded by the Development Studies Association, and the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies at Newnham College, Cambridge.

**Individuals interested in participating should email Dr Georgia Cole at gc389@cam.ac.uk by the 10th September 2019. They will then be sent a link to the participants questionnaire, which must be returned to complete the registration process.**