The NCRM quick start guide to:

Principles for effective pedagogy

NCRM National Centre for Research Methods

Teaching advanced research methods requires an understanding of methods and methodology alongside knowledge about effective teaching and learning. This guide outlines ten principles for effective pedagogy derived from substantial educational research. James & Pollard[1] developed the principles from synthesis of 100 projects and investments during the decade long ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). Our commentary prompts discussion about how the principles, often based on research in schools, may apply to the distinctive context of advanced social science research methods teaching. As James & Pollard (2011)[1] contend, by applying the principles to such new contexts we will be enriching, and creating new, pedagogical knowledge. We want this guide to be useful practically, and to add to debate about effective pedagogy.

1. Effective pedagogy equips learners for life in its broadest sense

The first principle goes beyond what researchers can claim about 'what works' to what they claim is important. James & Pollard[1] refer to facilitating the development of 'intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable them [learners] to participate as active citizens, contribute to economic development and flourish as individuals in a diverse and changing society'[1]. For methods teachers, this principle encourages us to look for worthwhile learning outcomes that go beyond skills, competence and understanding. It suggests we engage with broader and deeper dispositions towards knowledge and research.

2. Effective pedagogy engages with valued forms of knowledge

This principle focuses on *what* we teach. It promotes engaging learners with 'the big ideas, key skills and processes, modes of discourse, ways of thinking and practising, attitudes and relationships, which are the most valued learning processes and outcomes in particular contexts … [so that they] understand what constitutes quality, standards and expertise in different settings'[1]. This principle can help guide methods teachers in deliberations about what to include and omit from a research methods short course.

3. Effective pedagogy recognises the importance of prior experience and learning

Evidence indicates that we should take account of what learners know already, so that they and we can plan their next steps to build on prior learning and personal and cultural experiences. This principle implies that, even in a one-day course, time spent finding out about course participants and their prior learning is time well spent, helping to locate it as just one part of a wider learning journey. Our suggestions for applying this include gathering pre-course data and incorporating quizzes and warm up activities to find out what people know, think and want in relation to the course material.

4. Effective pedagogy requires learning to be scaffolded

Evidence about how to teach tells us we need to 'provide activities, cultures and structures of intellectual, social and emotional support to help learners to move forward in their learning'[1]. The concept of scaffolded learning relates to support from, and interaction with, a more knowledgeable or experienced other. The support is temporary and can involve making the learning task interesting, simplifying aspects of it, or stressing certain aspects, demonstrating and encouraging[2]. In research methods teaching scaffolding learning might mean:

- providing time for learners to work with each other to consolidate their understanding
- supplying online resources to support face-to-face teaching
- using hands-on activities to rehearse skills
- developing ongoing mentoring networks.

5. Effective pedagogy needs assessment to be congruent with learning

This principle is a reminder that 'assessment should be designed and implemented with the goal of achieving maximum validity both in terms of learning outcomes and learning processes'[1]. Research methods short courses often do not include assessment, but the principle prompts us to consider how we might incorporate assessment to advance learning. For example, Wray and Wallace (2011)[3] (in their ESRC Researcher Development Initiative work on 'learning to think like an expert') suggest experimenting with diagnostic self-assessment to help learners make the best connections between their needs and a given training opportunity.

To reference this guide, please cite:
Nind, M. & Lewthwaite, S. (2015) *Principles for effective pedagogy - NCRM quick start guide*. Manual. NCRM.

6. Effective pedagogy promotes the active engagement of the learner

This principle upholds 'learners' independence and autonomy'[1] and how this can be achieved to enhance learning. Becoming actively engaged supports learners to develop 'positive learning dispositions'[1]. In methods courses, fostering positive learning dispositions may lead learners to continue learning about the method after the short course. Many methods teachers are already working to promote active engagement and there are good examples in the literature[4]. These include actively involving learners in problem-based tasks, practising analysis of datasets, and using multimedia as a means to make the research process visible. Hands on work may range from highly simulated to fully authentic in learning by doing/ experiential approaches.

7. Effective pedagogy fosters both individual and social processes and outcomes

'Learners should be encouraged and helped to build relationships and communication with others for learning purposes'[1] thereby assisting 'the mutual construction of knowledge'[1]. In the case of research methods teaching, such social processes may aid the development of competence with specialist methods. This principle reminds us not to leave the social dimension to chance and instead to build in mechanisms to optimise the impact of our teaching by enabling group learning and support. Examples include group discussion, requiring learners to communicate excerpts of self-reflexive writing, and collaborating on data analysis tasks and challenges[4].

8. Effective pedagogy recognises the significance of informal learning

Evidence shows the importance of learning outside the formal context of the face-to-face or online course and indicates the value of using this in the more formal educational contexts. The principle is about recognising the enrichment value of everyday experience and implies that we need to build connections with, for example, workplace learning. In research methods teaching, this can mean asking people to bring their own experiences and understanding of their own cultural contexts to the classroom or workshop.

9. Effective pedagogy depends on the learning of all those who support the learning of others

As teachers or trainers, co-workers or fellow researchers, we need to learn continuously. Recognising ourselves as learners helps us to support others to develop knowledge and skills, and adapt to new research challenges more effectively. Inquiry into our own practices - methodological or pedagogical - warrants support in building a pedagogical culture for building capacity in research methods. There are clear benefits in creating learning communities among methods teachers[5].

10. Effective pedagogy demands consistent policy frameworks with support for learning as their primary focus

This final principle relates to systemic support and the need to create effective learning environments. NCRM pedagogical research has explicit goals to build the pedagogic culture around building capacity in research methods. We invite NCRM trainers to contribute to this culture by helping to develop frameworks for capacity building that are pedagogically robust.

References

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Further guides in this series are in production: look out for them on the NCRM website. As part of current research on The Pedagogy of Methodological Research project (http://pedagogy.ncrm.ac.uk/) We also appreciate feedback to inform future work.

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