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IPP Certificate Final Project
Research Methods Course Student Reflections
Presented by Pam Morris, March 15, 2017

Background

Today's students live in a globalized world connected through the internet, technology, and social media. Learning about the world's people is a main tenet in Jesuit education (Kolvenbach, 2008). Research is one way to understand other people. However, the abstract concepts, such as validity, reliability, sampling, and statistics, that are part of research method courses can be challenging for students.

In order to fulfill the final project requirement of the 2016/2017 Ignatian Pedagogy Certificate, I built my fall 2016 COMM 366 Research Methods: Observing and Measuring Communication Behavior course with hands-on projects – survey research and video sharing with South Korean students – and a reflection paper, one of the dimensions of the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm (IPP). The reflection asked students to make meaning of their experience of culture and research.

An analysis of the reflections will be used to consider improvements in the assignments and projects to provide for more effective student learning and to use as a foundation to build a new cross-cultural research methods course for the School of Communication (SOC).

Definition of the Topic

Understanding different cultures is one of the principles of a Jesuit education (Kolvenbach, 2008) and Loyola University Chicago's 2015-2020 strategic plan, *Plan 2020 Building a more just, humane, and sustainable world*, specifically calls for global engagement. A research methods course is an opportunity for students to learn of other people and reflection, a dimension of the IPP, can encourage deeper meaning for complex concepts. Student reflections can also be analyzed to improve pedagogy practices.

Reason for Selecting the Particular Approach

A research methods course is an opportunity for students to look across cultures to learn about other people, and also about their world and themselves. A hands-on project can also provide an environment and foster active and engaged learning and for students to make their own decisions for topics, design, and analyses.

Reflection is also considered an active process and learning tool that can be important in preparing for decision making (Peltier, Hay, & Drago, 2005). An early champion of the concept, Dewey (1933) defined reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" p. 9; as cited in Peltier et al., p. 251-252). Father Jose Mesa SJ (2016) described reflection as "a thoughtful consideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully" that can help students gain a deeper experience.

Hands-on learning and reflection are good methods to provide effective student learning of the complicated and sophisticated ideas that quantitative research methods and statistics present. It can also be a way to reach across cultures and learn about other groups of people.

Description of the Project

In the fall 2016 COMM 366 Research Methods course Loyola University Chicago students collaborated with students at Ewha Women's University in Seoul, South Korea, on a topic of their choice and having to do with fashion, identity, advertising, or consumerism. For the Chicago-based students, the project was multidimensional, including survey research, data analysis, reporting results in a video, writing an academic-style paper, and presenting results and experiences to the class. In addition, a common Facebook site titled "Fashion and the Cities" was created for students in both Seoul and Chicago to share results. The students in Seoul created videos of their learning of one of the topics and the Chicago students engaged and commented on these videos (three posts were required). Chicago students also needed to report survey results in a 3-4 minute video and upload it to Facebook and for Korean student comments.

The Chicago-based survey project required that Loyola students, working in groups, search and develop a literature review on their selected topic and derive a research question or questions to focus an investigation. Students created a quantitative questionnaire containing at least 20 questions and using Likert-type and Semantic Differential scales that measured aspects of the concepts each group had proposed to study. The survey needed to include a title and short introduction and conclusion texts that somewhat mirrored typical Institutional Review Board requirements that were discussed in the ethics lecture earlier in the semester. To help administer the process the instrument was limited to two pages.

Two class sessions were devoted for work on pilot tests and when students distributed five copies of their questionnaires to classmates to gain feedback and discuss concepts and variables. In about a week's time the groups revised questions and perfected the format of their questionnaires. Once the instruments were finalized and gained approval, I printed 20 copies for each group and emailed a PDF of the survey to the instructor in South Korea.

Using a convenience and purposive sample, students in Chicago found 20 individuals to complete their survey. Meanwhile, the instructor in Seoul made 20 paper copies of each of the questionnaires to distribute to students in the advertising, public relations, and strategic communication track course. Once those surveys were completed, they were scanned and saved electronically in a DropBox. The South Korean instructor emailed the DropBox link to the instructor in Chicago and where the completed surveys were downloaded, printed, and returned to the appropriate student groups.

Each group resulted in an average of 40 completed surveys with an equal balance from South Korea and the U.S. Groups input their data into SPSS and ran reports, including univariate and bivariate statistics, analyzed the data, looked for statistical differences between the two groups of cultures, and considered implications and practical applications for their findings.

Once initial statistics were obtained, the Chicago students reported results in a 3-4 minute video using their storytelling, visual, writing, and video editing skills learned and practiced in previous SOC courses. By week 13 of the semester groups posted their videos to the "Fashion and the Cities" Facebook page for the South Korean students' comments, allowing time for the Chicago students to incorporate perspectives, ideas, and reactions into their final papers and presentations.

A reflection paper was due the last week of the semester. Specifically, students were asked to respond, in a 1-1/2 to 2 page double-spaced paper, to four prompts:

- How has the survey project experience formed your understanding of research?
- How has the survey project experience and activities (survey, video, and posts) informed your understanding of culture?
- What two aspects of the experience and activities did you feel have an impact in changing your assumptions, the way you see yourself, or how you live?
- How did the activities help you in career or other future plans?

Implications of the Project

An analysis of the reflections will be used to consider improvements in the assignments and projects to make them more effective for student learning, to strengthen my teaching practices, and to use as a foundation to build a new cross-cultural research methods course for the SOC.

Experienced Outcomes

Reflection papers, the final assignment of a quantitative research methods course for communication majors taught in collaboration with a course in South Korea, were reviewed and analyzed. The major themes that emerged from the 22 papers relate to research and culture, including: initial perceptions of the course, how students gained a better understanding and respect for research, acknowledgements that research was exciting, and that the class helped make students more confident for conducting research. Students also reflected that the skills they learned in the class overlapped with and were being used in other courses. In a cultural aspect, students suggested that they learned about other groups of people as well as about themselves. These themes are summarized in the following sections.

Reflections on Research

Apprehension and limited perceptions. Many students offered thoughts of their initial perceptions at the start of the course, including apprehension and narrow views of research. The literature details the fear and anxiety students have for research methods courses (Fife, 2008) and these sentiments were seen in the reflection papers. As one student wrote,

Before I took this course, I had no idea what to expect from this class and quite honestly, I was a bit intimidated. The only thing I knew about research was that I ... had a difficult time reading and understanding those articles because they seemed so complex and long with a million different sections that I didn't understand. However, we are now finishing up finals week and my whole attitude and understanding about research have completely changed.

Many students also held a narrow view of research, as illustrated by two essay narratives: "I had always thought of research as something that scientists in white lab coats did in the basements of old universities. Clearly, this is not the case" and "I did not know what to expect in regards to research outside of the hard sciences. Because of this project, I now understand that research can be on humans with the use of surveys or interviews." The class seemed to help broaden students' perspectives about original research and that it can apply to advertising, public relations, and other communication practices, and one of the comments speaking to this is: "Research is not done only by scientists, research can be done by anyone in any field."

Better understanding. Expanding students' knowledge most likely encouraged a majority of students to write how they had a better understanding of research overall and many elaborated with details about the process. Student comments included: "This was the first research survey project I have ever been part of and I now have a better understanding of how much goes into the whole process," "The work that my group and I accomplished throughout the whole semester has helped me understand how to conduct, evaluate, analyze, and reflect upon research," and "The project helped give me a thorough understanding of all the steps of research and how to go about them as an individual and as a member of a group."

Demanding process. Given their new understanding and having worked through a complete research study, students experienced firsthand that the process was challenging, complex, and time consuming. Some comments that reflect these sentiments: "Research is a lot of work!" "It allows me to gain more knowledge about how much work and time it takes to conduct research," and "Going into this class, I had no idea the amount of work that went into a research project like this."

Students also noted their efforts on creating a thoughtful survey. These quotes include: "Creating an unbiased and coherent survey is a lot harder than I previously thought," "Producing a survey requires time and work in order for it to come back with results," and "I learned that research is a time consuming and detailed task in the sense that one's effort in building a survey and analyzing data determines the quality and clarity of any knowledge gained."

Changed perspective – respect. As mentioned earlier, some students started the course with apprehension and a narrow view of research, however, not only did the course activities prompt many students to change their ideas about research, but also students seemed to gain a respect for research and researchers. Relevant reflections include: "The experiences I had in this class gave me an understanding of how difficult it is to create a successful research project, and gave me a new respect for research," "Research is quite a journey, and my respect goes out to all the dedicated researchers out there," and "It also makes me respect researchers a lot more knowing all the time, energy and hard work they put into their research for others to utilize."

Exciting and fun. Even though the details, complexities, and process of research was perhaps daunting at times, students also expressed feelings of fun, excitement, anticipation, and exhilaration. Two texts that reflect these: "Once we were done doing the grunt work of fully learning the material associated with research, diving into the research project was so much fun! Using our university's statistics platform made me realize how exciting it was to collect data and inputting it to make sense of real-life trends and phenomena" and "Getting back the 20 surveys that we gave out here and the 20 that were given out in South Korea was one of my favorite parts because it was exciting to get to see them side-by-side. Also, it was fun knowing that someone across the world just took a survey that my group created."

When writing about the survey experience, other students reported, "I had a sense of accomplishment and I was looking forward to receiving our results from the Korean students" and "I would have never thought that I would get real data from another country. The best part was I created the questions for the Korean students which I was then able to compare to students in the United States."

Confidence. Similar to the previous narratives cited, the hands-on project also seemed to provide students with a sense of ease and even confidence, as one passage read: “Research papers were always scary to me because I would find them long and confusing. However, after taking this course and learning the structures of a research paper I find them easier to read now.” Other students were a little more sure of themselves as in these statements: “This course has given me the confidence to conduct research again” and “. . . the activities we did for this project helped me feel more confident in my preparedness for a corporate career in advertising. Now that I am familiar with gathering and interpreting data, I know that I can handle related tasks with ease if I am ever asked to do so.”

Used new skills in other courses. Students reported using skills learned in the research methods course in other classes, perhaps helping them become more familiar and confident with the material. I had heard these comments during class and several students offered these activities in their reflections, such as: “I was able to apply the knowledge I learned to studying research for a paper in a different class. Rather than aimlessly getting the barebones of the research project from the abstract, I was able to pick apart the report to get the information I truly needed,” “Learning about analyzing data, specifically using the SPSS system, has been very informative and reading results from studies, whether it was for this class or not, has made much more sense and are easier to read,” and “It was interesting seeing work done in the two classes [Business Statistics] crossover and reinforced the fact that knowledge of these practices will be useful to have later down the line.”

Reflections on Culture

Culturally eye-opening. One of the assignment prompts inquired specifically about culture and most students reported that they gained a new view of culture. Relevant reflections include:

...this experience was very eye opening for me because I got to compare and analyze the difference between two extremely different cultures. I will take this experience with me throughout my whole life with a better understanding that everyone comes from a different culture. Most importantly, the knowledge that I gained from my work changed the way I looked at people who come from other cultures. . . . every culture is unique in their own way.

Another student wrote:

The survey project and the activities that accompanied it have dramatically changed the way I think about and understand culture. Before, I was limited to only being exposed to my own culture, which resulted in me assuming that our societal trends were prominent across the world, this was a very ill-informed opinion to have, and I'm slightly embarrassed that I was ever that naïve. I learned so much information about just one culture other than my own that it is exhausting to think about all the societal differences there are in cultures all over the world.

Learning about oneself. More than one student reflected about their own culture. These explanations highlight some of their thinking: “I was also surprised by how much I ended up learning about my own culture,” “I am now much more aware of how elements of my environment influence my thought

process,” and “I thought it was interesting that I even learned things about my own culture, for example how Americans tend to be more judgmental than other cultures, which obviously I find sad.”

Further Applications

This semester, spring 2017, I am experimenting with several reflection assignments after each project rather than one final reflection at the end of the semester. Finding appropriate prompts is challenging. I will continue building knowledge of this topic to use in all of my courses.

Using the model of cross-cultural collaboration and reflection, I wrote and submitted a paper to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), one of the important national associations for SOC faculty and scholars. In this way this project has helped me continue my teaching research agenda.

With the framework of literature and course model that I have developed, I intend to fine-tune the partnership with the South Korean class and eventually build on the structure to include collaborations with other countries. I was also planning to develop a cross-cultural research course, but I realize that maybe I have already.

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