Bringing the Field into the Classroom: Methods and Experiential Learning in the

'Politics of Development'

Kristi Heather Kenyon

Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Methods training is typically cordoned off into specific, designated courses and is often consequently isolated from the content of the topics we study. As a result of this separation, methods may appear abstract or technical particularly to undergraduate students who usually have no experience or expectation of applying methods during their degrees. Unlike other social sciences with a tradition of field school, in political science methods training and experiential learning are rarely linked. This paper discusses one experience of incorporating qualitative methods and experiential learning into a mixed undergraduate/graduate seminar on a substantive topic - the 'Politics of Development'. I argue that weaving experiential methods training into substantive courses can prove a useful introduction to interviewing and fieldwork, enhance student engagement with subject-based literature and concepts, and potentially serve as a gateway for further methods education.

Teaching Research Methods

Despite research indicating that student engagement and learning experiences improve when methods are linked to practice and integrated into substantive curriculum (Mvududu, 2005; Scheel, 2002; Centellas, 2011), methods are usually taught separately from substantive aspects of political science (Elman, Kapiszeski and Kirilova, 2015; Centellas, 2011). Research on the teaching of methods identifies a lack of enthusiasm on

the part of both students, among whom such courses are often 'unpopular' and 'avoided' (Gibbs, 2010, p. 45), and faculty, who have described methods teaching as 'a thankless and often unsatisfying task' (De Boef, 2001).[1] Although there have been calls in the discipline for systematic integration into the undergraduate curriculum (Wahlke, 1991) inconsistencies remain in whether methods are required or even offered as part of an undergraduate political science degree (Parker, 2010; Hill, 2002; Thies and Hogan, 2005). Where available, courses are more often quantitative rather than qualitative in nature (Turner and Thies, 2009). Research by Parker indicates that methods instruction – broadly defined – is generally weaker in 'countries that emphasize broad and flexible liberal arts degrees' such as the United States, Canada and Australia, and stronger in more focused European programs (Parker, 2010, pp. 121-122). However, despite the isolation, inconsistent offering, and dampened enthusiasm, there is widespread recognition of the value of methods training. Methods skills are seen as integral in developing informed consumers and practitioners of academic research (Elman, Kapiszewski and Kirilova, 2015; Wahlke, 1991).

Experiential Methods

In contrast with methods teaching, among both students and faculty, there is growing enthusiasm for experiential learning. Understood as 'a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied' (Borzak, 1981 as cited in Brookfield, 1984, p. 16), experiential learning is broadly seen as consisting of first-hand experience, active learning, experimentation and adaptation in new environments, and reflection (Moon, 2004; Kolb, 1984). Although these components have been sequenced in various ways, Kolb's (1984)

four stage model of the learning process remains the gold standard. His framework consists of: 1) concrete experience, 2) reflective observation, 3) abstract conceptualization and 4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984, p. 33). The activities that constitute this learning cycle can take various forms including: internships, international service learning, field courses and involvement in faculty research (Herrick, Matthias and Nielson, 2015; Moon, 2004; Tiessen and Huish, 2014).

While not without ethical, educational and logistical risks and challenges (Tiessen and Epprecht, 2012; Barrow, Hofrenning and Parkhurst, 2005), experiential learning is viewed as holding important benefits including: 'more highly developed thinking and problem solving skills' (Brock and Cameron, 1999, 252) increased educational ownership and willingness to learn from classmates, improved academic performance, a 'deeper understanding of politics and political science,' and 'heightened intellectual curiosity and emotional connection to course material' (Barrow, Hofrenning and Parkhurst 2005, 419). Unlike other social science disciplines such as anthropology which have a tradition of methods-oriented field schools, in political science it is not common to link experiential learning to methods training, even though, as Berry and Robinson (2012) argue, experiential approaches may be particularly well suited to undergraduate methods teaching.

The Course

In developing an advanced seminar course (4th year/ Master's) on the 'Politics of Development' at Acadia University, a small primarily undergraduate university in rural Nova Scotia, Canada, I sought to include elements of international fieldwork – a classic method of experiential learning in the social sciences. The 'Politics of Development' was classified as a subject-area seminar rather than a specific methodology course and was offered in a department without a designated methods course. In teaching this course for the first time, I reflected on my own experience of fieldwork-based research and anticipated that integrating methods and substantive material would lead to improved student understanding of both areas. With this in mind, I sought to develop a hybrid course whereby methods were taught and used as inroads into the course's substantive focus the 'Politics of Development.' In a twelve week class, I aimed to integrate methods in a way that offered direct exposure to topic-based material and independent exploration while providing training and guidance in a partially 'controlled context' (Elman, Kapiszewski and Kirilova, 2015). I chose to do so by structuring the class around both substantive concepts and interviews of development practitioners and scholars, assigning class readings and activities that provided substantive as well as methodological background.

My objectives in placing experiential methods at the center of a 'Politics of Development' course were threefold. First, I wanted students to be exposed to the

opinions of those doing the subject we were studying, and allow them to compare and contrast these perspectives to those of the authors we read. Through this exposure I hoped to problematize the idea of expertise by bringing diverse and divergent voices into the classroom. I also anticipated that including an experiential research component would enable students to feel more connected to and engaged with the topic of development and be exposed to and better able to critically analyze a broad variety of approaches and opinions. Second, I aimed to prepare students for independent research by providing them with a taste of techniques and experiences they might encounter in fieldwork allowing them to develop skills related to interviewing, ethics, transcription and the use of primary materials. Finally, as far as is possible in a classroom setting, I wanted students to complete the course with a personal experience of the topic. For a classroom consisting entirely of students raised in North America, development can seem distant and un-relatable. Without leaving campus I aimed for students to engage with development in a way that made it real, relevant and, on some level, personal.

In order to achieve the objectives outlined above, I chose to incorporate methods into this substantive course deliberately and systematically reflecting this dual emphasis in the course description, structure, and objectives. The course's syllabus gave the following thematic introduction signaling the linking of theory and practice in the final paragraph:

> Development is a concept that is understood, practiced and researched in many different and conflicting ways. While some view development as an emancipatory expression of global solidarity others see it as a continuation of colonialism. The practice of development is at least as diverse, including economic, social, cultural, health and environmental interventions. Although the discourse of development is not new, key components of the concept remain contested. What is development? How do we measure it? Is it always desirable? Who "does" development? Who benefits? Where does development take place? Finally, how do we as scholars

study development? Do we challenge or reinforce particular perspectives of development by how we conduct our research?

This course explores these and other questions through a focus on specific authors, case studies and exercises. Through a seminar-based class which requires a high level of student engagement, leadership and participation we will learn about development while also practicing qualitative research skills.

Following this general description the syllabus went on to divide the course into three sections: 1) perspectives on development, 2) solutions to development problems and 3) challenges to development initiatives, with a particular focus on HIV and gender. Noting that "[a]longside the investigation of these substantive issues, we will engage in research on development by conducting interviews with development practitioners and scholars" each section also had a specific methods focus: 1) introduction to interviewing skills, 2) interviewing, and 3) using qualitative data in research. Mirroring this structure each section was guided by two sets of parallel questions: one set addressing the course's substantive topic, the other addressing methodological skills and techniques. For example, section one which focused on perspectives on development/interviewing, included three substantive questions: 1) what is development? 2) what does development aim to achieve? 3) what are the ends and means of development?, and three methods-based questions: 1) what are qualitative interviews? 2) how do I conduct a qualitative interview? and, 3) what are the ethical considerations and processes of interview-based qualitative research? Reflecting this dual approach and the objectives outline above, course learning aims included subject-based and skill-based goals, including, for example, critically examining diverse perspectives on development, development interventions and development challenges, interpreting different forms of data (academic articles, policy pieces, interviews), and learning how to conduct qualitative interviews

and how to use qualitative data in a research paper.

Designing the Assignment

I designed the course around one central assignment: conducting telephone and skype interviews with development practitioners and scholars in different parts of the world. To the extent possible I wanted students involved in each step of the research project: developing questions, carrying out research, writing up and presenting findings, and finally, sharing results with research participants. The assignment consequently had multiple components, including skill-building prior to the core interview and data analysis training afterwards.

While I was excited about giving students the opportunity to talk to people in the development field, I was also nervous about offering this as a first interview experience for students in the class. To build their confidence as well as mine I incorporated elements of research methods and data collection from the outset. Students began the first class by interviewing a classmate about their perspectives on development. While partner interviews are a relatively common first day introductory activity, in this instance this exercise was deliberately chosen to lead into a discussion of interviewing skills and

strategies and was linked to course readings such as Turner's (2010) 'Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators.'

In concert with the more technical aspects of data collection, I sought to incorporate some discussion of the strengths, weaknesses and biases of different methods. In doing so, I did not aim to be exhaustive, but to introduce the idea that the methods we use may present or highlight different aspects of our findings. Students participated in a group activity, for example, where they were challenged to 'explain international development' with limitations placed on the kind of data they could use (one group had to tell a narrative from one person's perspective, another group was limited to statistical data, etc.). In addition to a discussion of the substance of development, this activity led into a conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of different methods and forms of data. Students contrasted the rich detail, and personal impact of individual stories, with the broad but impersonal perspective offered by large N statistical data. We also discussed the persuasiveness and influence of different types of data on various audiences (the public, policy makers, etc.).

Alongside these methods oriented exercises, I integrated readings, discussions and assignments related to research ethics. I assigned readings on ethical research conduct such as the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct Involving Humans (2010) and [redacted] University ethics documents. Students were required to complete the Tri-Council online ethics tutorial (n.d.) and submit their certificate of completion prior to conducting interviews outside of the classroom. Students then

employed regular ethics procedures using initial letters of contact and following an oral consent protocol.

Having had an opportunity to reflect on their initial in-class interviews, and to learn about the techniques, rationales and ethics of interviewing, students subsequently conducted mini-interviews with a classmate by phone or skype. They recorded and transcribed these interviews submitting the audio recording and transcript for evaluation. This small assignment offered a gentle introduction to interviewing and transcription and facilitated discussion of the differences between face to face and telephone interviews. This exercise also enabled students to practice using the technology they would employ in their formal interviews and to share tips and best practices. To record their interviews, for example, many students found Apple's 'GarageBand'[2] program more accessible than phone-based or digital recorders.

Along with methodological skills, students engaged with literature on development with key questions related to both substance and method identified for each third of the course. Substantive readings included Sen's (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Moyo's (2011) *Dead Aid* (2011), as well as critiques and responses, the Millenium Development Goals (United Nations, 2013) – including their applicability to northern Canada (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2005), and a selection of articles by Sachs and Easterly (see for example Sachs, 2005; Easterly, 2009). These works helped to engage with substantive questions such as: what is development? What does it aim to achieve? What is the role of aid in development? Whose job is it to 'do' development?

Where is development located geographically? How is development success evaluated? How is failure evaluated? The final part of the course examined threats to development, with a particular focus on HIV. Readings in this section included former UN Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa Stephen Lewis' (2011 edition) *Race Against Time*, and writer and African studies scholar Jonny Steinberg's (2008) *Sizwe's Test* - an ethnographic account of anti-retroviral roll-out in South Africa's rural Eastern Cape. Questions for this section included: what are threats to development? How does HIV affect development? How does gender affect the way development is implemented? Who, if anyone, gets left out of development? Why? How? These substantive questions were buttressed by discussion of the different disciplinary backgrounds, methodological approaches and types of data used by the various authors.

Although I would have liked for students to develop the interview guide themselves drawing on course readings this did not prove feasible in a twelve week class. Instead, I composed a semi-structured interview guide, incorporating substantive questions addressed by the readings. After sharing the guide with the class and having them use it in their mini-interviews, students brainstormed additional questions, and voted for their favorite two ('what do you think is the biggest misunderstanding about development?' and 'is development an end in itself or a means to achieve a goal?'), which were added to the interview guide after a class decision about where best to place them in the sequence of questions. Students also practiced 'probing' for more detail and we discussed how and where questions could be added during the interview process to follow-up on interesting topics or emerging ideas.

Table 1: Building up to Interviewing

1. Face-to-face interviews of classmates
2. Discussion of interviewing and transcription techniques
3. Exercise on the strengths and weaknesses of different methods
4. Ethics readings and tutorial
5. Mini-interviews with classmates over phone or skype
6. Reflection and discussion on interviewing equipment and logistics
7. Reading, discussion and presentation of literature on development (integrated throughout)
8. Development and selection of new questions to add to the interview guide

The final interview guide consisted of five parts. First students introduced the course assignment and solicited oral consent. Next they gathered basic demographic data (gender,[3] location, practitioner or scholar, current country of residence, years of experience). Third, they asked questions about the interviewee's experiences with development, followed by a section titled 'reflecting on development' which asked more conceptual questions (ie 'how would you define development?'). The approximately 45 minute interviews concluded with a short section asking what research on development participants felt was needed, how participants would like to be referred to in student papers, whether participants would like a copy of student papers once completed, and thanking participants for their time.

Table 2: Interview Guide Excerpts

Introduction
[Summary of course, solicitation of oral consent]

Demographic Data
Are you male or female?
Do you consider yourself primarily a development practitioner, a development scholar, or something else?
What country do you currently live in?
What is your country of origin?
How many years would you say you've been in the 'development' field (as you understand it)?

Experiences with Development
Can you tell me about where you currently work and what you do?
Can you tell me how you started working in this field?
Can you explain to me what motivates you to do what you do?
What is a mainstream approach to development in your view?
- Is this the same or different from what you do?
- How?

Reflecting on Development
How would you define development?
Can you describe an example of a successful development initiative that you witnessed or were involved in?
- Why do you think it was successful?

Can you describe an example of an unsuccessful development initiative?
- Why do you think it failed?

What, in your view is the biggest misunderstanding about development?
In your view, is development an end in itself or a means to achieve a goal?
In your opinion, is there any group that often gets left out of development?
- Who?
- How so?
- Could you give me an example?

If you could suggest one topic for research on development that would be useful to you, what would it be?

Concluding
How would you like to be identified when I or my colleagues cite this interview?
Would you be interested in having a copy of our final papers sent to you by email?
Thank you for taking part in this interview.

Negotiating Logistics

Designing the assignment involved numerous logistical challenges. How could I mediate

the chances of things going wrong (students panicking, technology failing)? How could I

have students with limited experience identify interviewees in countries they had never visited? Was it reasonable to expect students to pay long distance charges?

In order to provide a variety of experiences, peer support, and keep workload manageable, students conducted two interviews in pairs, with each person leading half of each interview. Having two students present at each interview meant that while one was asking questions, the other could ensure the interview was being properly recorded, take notes, and monitor phone card or skype credit. I anticipated that interviewing in pairs would increase the quality of interviews and provide back-up and encouragement.

To mediate difficulties in locating interviewees, low response rates to 'cold' emails, and to provide a friendly atmosphere for first time interviewers, I chose to identify interviewees myself. Drawing on my personal and professional contacts in the development field, I deliberately sought people from different sectors of development, including those working in non-governmental organizations, governments of the global North and South, small businesses, First Nations organizations, universities, religious organizations, and large mining companies. I made a choice to muddy the geographic divides of 'developed' and 'developing' world, by including people working on development-related issues within Canada. I also considered country of origin and gender, although, due to my own experience base, certain groups were over-represented (women, Canadians, people working in Africa, the NGO sector). The final list of included people located in eight countries (Australia, Botswana, Canada, Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States), working on projects in these countries as

well as in Brazil, Timor Leste, Liberia and South Africa. While I sought to provide variety amongst the interviewees, I did not attempt to or succeed at obtaining a representative sample of development practitioners and scholars.

Table 3: Interview Participants

	Sector(s)	Topic(s) of Work	Location	Location of work	Country of Origin	M /F
1	Indigenous Governance Organization	Health, mining	Canada	Canada	Canada	F
2	Local Non-Governmental Organization	Children, youth, health	Botswana	Botswana	Canada	F
3	Academia/ Consulting	Gender, health, post-conflict	Australia	Liberia	Liberia	F
4	Small Business	Disability, entrepreneurship	Canada	Brazil/ Global	Canada	M
5	International Non-Governmental Organization/ Academia	Shareholder activism	Canada	Canada/ Global	India	F
6	Consulting, Non-Governmental Organization, Academia	Refugees, media, gender	Canada	Afghanistan	Iran	F
7	Consulting, Non-Governmental Organization	Health, community development, sanitation	Botswana	East Timor	Canada	M
8	Media, Humanitarian Organization, Non-Governmental Organization	Health	United States	South Africa	United States	F
9	Local Government	Development, governance	Ghana	Ghana	Sri Lanka	F
10	International Mining Company	Mining, economic development	Canada	Canada/ Global	Colombia	M
11	Private Investment Company	Responsible investing	Canada	Canada/ Global	Canada	M
12	Private Investment Company	Responsible investing	Canada	Canada/ Global	Canada	M
13	Local Non-Governmental Organization, Academia	Health, poverty alleviation, gender	Uganda	Uganda	Uganda	F
14	Donor Agency	Health	Botswana	Botswana	Botswana	F
15	Religious Non-Governmental Organization	Poverty alleviation, development	Canada	Canada/ Global	Canada	F
16	Academia, Government, Non-Governmental Organization	Orphanhood, health, community development	Scotland	Botswana	Canada	F
17	Donor Government	Development partnership, education	Rwanda	Rwanda	Canada	F
18	Academia/Advocacy	Minority/Indigenous rights, media	Canada	Europe	United States	F
19	International Non-Government Organization	Health	Botswana	Botswana	Canada	F
20	Local Non-Governmental Organization	Health, community development	Botswana	Botswana	United States	F

Finally, I was unsure about giving an assignment that could involve cost. What I chose to do was to consider phone cards or skype credit necessary course equipment equivalent to textbooks, listing them under 'course materials' in the syllabus. As assigned books were available on library reserve I felt this was a reasonable option and not inherently different from common and uncalculated course costs associated with computer use, printing and photocopying.

Interviewing and Beyond

I provided each student pair with the name and contact information of two interviewees, aiming to provide each pair with interviewees in different geographic locations and, where possible, with contrasting areas of experience and expertise. Although I had obtained preliminary consent to participate prior to the start of the course, students were responsible for emailing potential interviewees using a letter of initial contact, for soliciting consent to participate, and for coordinating a convenient time or method (ie skype or phone) for interviews.

I wanted to incorporate a reflexive element into the assignment to get students used to the practice of debriefing from fieldwork. As part of the interview instructions I recommended a short informal debrief between interviewers after each interview. More formally, each interview pair did a short in-class presentation on their interview experience addressing the following questions:

    a. Logistics: Did you encounter any challenges? Do you have any recommendations?

b. Comparison: What was different between the two interviewees? What was different between the two interviewers? What can you/did you learn from your partner?

c. Content: What was surprising? Do the perspectives of your interviewees reflect or contrast with the theories studied in class?

Following the interviews, students then transcribed one interview each, taking care to identify interview participants according to their specified preferences, and uploaded their transcripts to the course intranet site. Interview transcripts formed the basis for subsequent class instruction and activities on coding. Students coded short excerpts in pairs and traded off so that they could see different ways of coding the same passages. These activities provided the background for the individual interview coding needed for the term paper assignment.

The interview assignment culminated in students writing term papers that: discussed related literature, described the method used, examined primary data, and put forward conclusions and areas for future work. Students were asked to choose one of three methodological options: 1) compare two subsets of interviews (for example scholars and practitioners, men and women, those in the global north and global south), 2) compare one subset of interviews with a particular development theory, 3) analyze the answer to one particular question across all interviews. Students were required to submit a list of codes they had used with their term papers. On the day the papers were due each student did a short presentation of their findings to the class, a brief nod to the conference presentation. The final step of the assignment was, if the interviewee requested it, for students to forward their completed papers to participants as a form of knowledge

translation. This structure was an attempt, in a short time frame and in a guided context, to walk students through the 'life cycle' of a qualitative research paper.

Table 4: Interviewing and Beyond

1. Conduct two partner interviews
2. Transcribe interviews and upload to course intranet site
3. Participate in in-class coding exercise
4. Write term papers drawing on interview data
5. Present papers to the class
6. Share papers with interview participants

I assessed each component of the assignment: mini-interviews, interviews, interview presentations, transcripts and term papers. Interviews were marked based on properly obtaining consent, interviewing techniques (openness, neutrality, professionalism, tone of voice, timing, probing, staying on topic) and teamwork, with transcripts also marked for accuracy. Term papers were marked on overall quality, method, and use of primary data.

Discussion

This paper offers one model for the integration of experiential methods training into undergraduate or early graduate curriculum that, in my experience, proved neither 'unpopular or avoided' (Gibbs, 2010, p. 45) among students,[1] nor 'thankless and […] unsatisfying' (De Boef, 2001) to teach.[2]   Through first-hand experience and 'a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied' (Borzak, 1981 as cited in Brookfield, 1984, p. 16) students also gained greater depth in the substance of the 'Politics of Development.' Live dialogue with development practitioners and scholars brought new

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[1] This was not a required course and was full.
[2] A testament to the satisfying nature of teaching this course is that I excitedly checked the course website constantly as transcripts were uploaded, reading them immediately. Although I was quite familiar with both the subject matter and knew many of the interviewees quite well, in every instance my own knowledge of development was expanded in reading these interviews. Students frequently approached me outside of class to share their interview experiences, universally describing it as a positive experience.

voices, ideas and experiences into the classroom including alternative forms of expertise based on practical experience.

To revisit the objectives outlined at the outset, my aims with this course's central assignment were threefold: 1) to enrich students' knowledge of development by allowing them to interact with practitioners and engaged scholars problematizing the idea of expertise and allowing for comparison between readings and interview data, 2) to prepare students for independent research by teaching skills relating to methods, ethics and fieldwork, and 3) to provide students with the opportunity to interact with the topic of development on a personal and experiential level.

Reflecting on the first objective, I found that the interviewing assignment was a catalyst for a 'deeper understanding' (Barrow, Hofrenning and Parkhurt 2005, 419) of the substance of the course. Students naturally drew comparisons between interviews and readings, bringing new perspectives and unconventional critiques into the classroom. This process served to strengthen learning of key concepts in several ways. First, it facilitated active engagement with the literature. Students independently identified contrasts and synergies between the theoretical literature and the perspectives and experiences of practitioners. In several instances students either asked follow-up questions informed by course readings or, had interviewees refer to assigned works. In both instances this facilitated a 'real' discussion of development theories and practices that was qualitatively different from classroom discussions on the same topic. Rather than

an abstract conversation, students engaged in an applied investigation of how the literature was or was not useful in understanding the experiences of their interviewees. Second, interviews allowed students to identify what was missing from the literature including alternative critiques and models of practicing development. Students were also able to note topics that arose in the literature but not interviews, or in one of their interviews but not the other. This resulted in discussions about the variation in ideas and exposure across different practitioners, in different locations and sectors and with differing levels of experience. Third, having access to both literature and interviewees allowed students to situate individual actors and organizations within the larger global concept of development. This included discussions of how experiences and understandings of development success and failure might diverge between micro-level experiences and macro-level analyses. Finally, the comparison and contrast of literature and interviews served as a useful catalyst for an examination of legitimacy and expertise prompting questions such as: who should we consider the experts on development? and, what sources of information should guide policy? Through reflection on their interviews and those of their colleagues, students recognized the contributions of expertise from both within and beyond academia. Reflecting these contributions to student learning, I found that the interview assignment substantially enriched the quality of classroom discussion. Natural comparisons between interviews and literature, as described above, provided an organic alternative to discussion prompts.

Through the process of the course students also had the opportunity to practice a number of research skills and techniques. In total each student participated in conducting four

interviews of different forms and lengths, transcribed one mini-interview and one full interview, coded a minimum of five interviews, presented on their interviews and research and wrote a paper. All twenty interviews were completed, and all resulted in interesting and usable transcripts. Although not a precise parallel to the 'pedagogical sequence' favored by Elman, Kapiszewski and Kirilova (2015), this assignment explored the middle ground between an entirely contrived methods exercise using pre-existing data, and a fully independent project with students identifying research topics, questions and participants. This approach provided an introduction to methods, development and independent research in a way that, in my view, made further exploration of each seem more accessible, and hopefully, also a little more interesting. Several students commented that they planned to use the methods explored in class in subsequent thesis research and that this somewhat controlled exposure provided a useful introduction.

Although interviewing someone over the phone offers only the loosest possible parallel to fieldwork, this loose link is not without transferable competencies beyond the nuts and bolts of methodological techniques. Prior to interviews I discussed the unpredictability of fieldwork with students, noting in a course handout that:

> Fieldwork is an incredibly rewarding part of research, but also one where things seldom go as planned, and there are often unexpected frustrations (as well as unexpected insights and rewards!). While I have tried to mediate some of these by corresponding with each person you will interview ahead of time to brief them on the assignment and to gain preliminary consent to participate – you should expect, and plan for the unexpected.

I included a list of possible mishaps to prepare for including: unanswered calls, not being able to get ahold of interviewees, failed recording equipment, difficulty understanding

accents (or being understood), poor line quality or skype reception, getting disconnected, interviewees needing to leave suddenly, etc. Most of these mishaps occurred as did several more: students had phone cards that cut out unexpectedly, scheduling difficulties, and misunderstood time zones. These minor difficulties provide some parallel to the unpredictability of fieldwork demonstrating the need for adaptability and innovation. I was impressed by the extent to which students successfully managed these challenges – they called back, rescheduled, used two recording devices, ran to buy additional phone cards, abridged their interviews, spoke clearly, took back-up notes, and politely asked people to repeat themselves.

Finally, although the interviews did not entail leaving the town or the country, the manner in which students reflected on the assignment was clearly as an experience rather than a task. Students demonstrated an 'emotional connection to course material' (Barrow, Hofrenning and Parkhurst 2005, p. 419) and engaged in learning as a 'a continuous process' rooted in this experiential voyage (Zuber-Skerritt 1992, p. 103). The process of interviewing, for example, involves establishing rapport and, through this rapport, developing a relationship, albeit it time-limited and topic-specific. This connection, and the fact that it was experienced alongside a colleague, resulted in lived engagement with the topic. Because each pair had different interviewees, class discussions became a real forum of 'sharing' information – where each pair had varied experiences to impart to the group, and distinct comparisons to make. As students integrated their interview knowledge into classroom discussions they were also able to speak as experts on their own interviews, developing and integrating a form of experiential expertise into the

course. As evidence of the experiential nature of this class, unlike most assignments, the interviewing project was one about which students frequently spoke to family, friends and other faculty generating the experiential learning 'buzz that spills out of the classroom' (Barrow, Hofrenning and Parkhurst, 2005, p. 419).

Reflecting Kolb's four stage model of experiential learning, throughout the term students cycled through stages of concrete experience, reflective observation and discussion, envisioning abstract concepts and active experimentation. As Healey and Jenkins argue, 'learners should go through [this] cycle several times, so it may be best thought of as a spiral of cycles' (Healey and Jenkins 2000, p. 186). The course as a whole was structured around these four stages with respect to both method and substance. As noted earlier, at the outset, for example, students conducted two short interviews with colleagues. This exercise prepared students for the larger interview assignment by allowing them early practical experience with the exercise and techniques. These experiences were followed by focused reflection where students talked about what techniques were successful in establishing rapport, linking questions, and encouraging respondents to speak, as well as technical comments about recording equipment and strategies. Next, classroom discussions encouraged students to envision what might be the same or different in conducting interviews with development scholars and practitioners, what kind of problems might emerge and how they would address them. Finally, students engaged in active experimentation in their final interviews and term papers where they put in place skills that had been practiced in class but used them in slightly different conditions and with a higher level of independence.

In parallel to this methods cycle, students moved through the same sequence with respect to subject-area knowledge. As noted earlier, on the first day of class students took part in an activity where they were challenged to 'explain development' using specific types of data (ie statistics, first person narrative). This concrete experience led into a broad reflective discussion about both the substance of development (what development means, what it aims to do, who the actors and recipients are) and the strength and weaknesses of possible strategies of investigation. Following this discussion students encountered a variety of development theories based on class readings and took turns conducting group presentations. Through these activities students teased out how they understood the central concept of the course. Finally, the students wrote papers in which they drew on both interview data and literature seeking to test the applicability of theories about development they had developed themselves or, that had emerged from the literature.

While the overall structure of the course reflected Kolb's model, this cycle also informed individual classes and activities. Reflecting the contention that, 'the cycle may be entered at any point, but the stages should be followed in sequence' (Healey and Jenkins 2000, p. 188) specific tasks or topics often began with concrete experience or abstract conceptualization, subsequently moving through the rest of the cycle. Learning about how to code interview transcripts for example included: 1) learning about theories and methods of coding (abstract conceptualization), 2) a group discussion-based exercise where students tried out ideas of possible codes and coding (active experimentation), 3) a more in-depth activity in pairs where students actively coded excerpts of interview

transcripts (concrete experience) and finally, a group discussion reflecting on how different pairs had coded sections, and challenges encountered in coding (reflective observation).

In addition to the goals I set out to achieve, there were several unanticipated results from this activity. First, several students noted that the interviews provided much needed optimism in contrast with readings they often found 'depressing.' Students found that the interviews introduced new models of development that some found more persuasive including investment and solidarity-based models. The interviews also raised personal confidence. Interviewee familiarity with course readings, for example, reinforced students' sense of personal capacity and knowledge. Several students also noted that the exercise raised their confidence with respect to oral communication and, particularly phone-based professional interactions.

Lessons Learned

Although this well-received course demonstrates what can be accomplished in a single term, in my view this type of learning would be most effective in the form of full-year course. A two-term structure would enable students to spend more time engaging with both methods and substantive literature and, as a result, would allow for active participation in developing the interview guide. It would also ease instructor logistics with regard to identifying the correct number of interviewees. In this instance

interviewees needed to be contacted prior to the course 'add/drop' date meaning there was a need to adapt to fluctuating numbers. Finally, a full-year course would also allow time for more interviews to be conducted, including advancing from partner interviewees to individual interviews. If such a course were consistently offered over several years it would also build a database of interview transcripts enabling students to draw on a larger number of respondents in their term papers and conduct a greater variety of comparisons.

A course like the one described here could also be integrated into a sequence of courses gradually building up to field trips and 'real' independent fieldwork. Structuring such a sequence would also facilitate student involvement in the form of experienced teaching assistants and guest presenters who could share their own expertise. The trade-off to such a systematic sequencing, however, would be that it may make such courses less accessible to some students (including exchange students, transfer students, minors, etc.) and might be difficult for smaller departments who may not be able to offer methods-integrated courses in multiple subject areas.

For instructors it is important to note that the structure of this course is labor-intensive and necessitates either small class numbers or teaching assistants. With a class of twenty I was able to give very detailed feedback (including listening to and checking all audio), a feat that would prove impossible in a larger class. Marking could be made more efficient by trading exhaustive audio checking for random spot-checking. Similarly, in lieu of having the instructor identify and contact all interviewees, an alternative would be to have students identify one person (or more) in the community to interview (examining for

example student or community opinions of development and contrasting those with practitioner views).

Finally, to better assess the impact of this method it would be useful to gather data over several years and compare 'traditional' versions of the 'Politics of Development' that do not include experiential methods to those that do. This, in concert, with some form of parallel assessment across both courses would provide more substantive data to show whether my impressions discussed here, are more broadly confirmed and generalizable.

Conclusions

In teaching the 'Politics of Development' I aimed to provide students with an experience of both the methods and substance of qualitative research on development. By engaging directly with people working in and on development, the topic became relatable to the class and by using methods to gather new data, students experienced the joy of discovery and were able to intuitively make comparisons between and across interviews and literature. While not providing the depth of methodological insight of a dedicated methods course, this class piqued curiosity about development and the methods used to explore it and, in my view, increasing the likelihood that students would seek out further education in both fields. Drawing on the insights, benefits and practices of experiential learning, including Kolb's four stage cycle, the structure of this course provides a potential template of how experiential methods education might be integrated into other substantive courses.

Weaving methods into substantive courses also served to strengthen student engagement and knowledge of the subject area being examined. In this instance student involvement in the literature was sparked and reinforced by interviews which allowed them to discuss literature with practitioners and subject-area scholars, and to compare and contrast interview data and course readings. Such actions brought analysis of key texts and concepts to life for students, making abstract theories relevant and bringing to light the practical implications of different theoretical viewpoints. Although the short time line of this twelve week course condensed features of both methods and content that might be better explored in a full-year course, this structure allowed for an accessible course that provided students with a 'taste' for the substance, practice and research of 'development' in both national and international contexts.

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[1] It should be noted that much of the cited research refers to quantitative methods which are more widely taught than qualitative methods in political science.

[2] A program intended to create and record music.

[3] In future I would amend this question to allow for more than 2 options.