

# **INFUSING RESEARCH-MINDEDNESS IN A PSYCHOLOGY HONOURS MODULE**

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# CONTEXT: THE TAU FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

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- The TAU Fellowship Programme seeks to advance teaching quality and the professionalisation of teaching and learning
- Professional development of a cohort of mid to senior level academic staff from all disciplines
- Training in developments relating to teaching and learning in higher education
- Positioned as change agents
- Participants develop an educational project and a group project
- Partnerships with colleagues
- Equipped to lead change processes relating to teaching and learning in home institutions

# RESEARCH METHODS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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- Some psychology students do not understand the need to learn research methods
- Some students are dismayed at having to take compulsory modules in research methods
- For some students, scientific thinking is inappropriately applied to psychology
- There is sometimes scepticism about whether psychological experiences can and should be measured
- Methodology and ideology are seen to coincide by some students and academics

# TAU INTERVENTION

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- Recurriculating the 771 Research Methods module
- Increasing social relevance
- Relating the module to graduate attributes
- Making it more fun

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- Before 2020 – class as usual
  - 2020 – In class until March and then online using SUNLearn
  - 2021 – Online only using SUNLearn with some success

# 2022 – A different module after TAU

- Back in class and the module took the form of...
  - Student presentations
  - Powerpoint and voice-over presented on SUNLearn
  - In-class discussions
  - Flipped classroom

# Student presentations

- A courtroom drama
- Up-front presentations
- A focus group and feedback session
- Powerpoint
- Short video clips
- A skit
- Game show

# Use of SUNLearn

- Video clips to show how to conduct qualitative data analysis
- Sharing podcasts of issues that were discussed in class





# SOME DRAWBACKS OF THE INTERVENTION

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- Some students didn't like going off topic in class
- Some students preferred the same theme to be maintained between the SUNLearn Powerpoint presentations and class discussions
- Lecture required good facilitation to make sure everyone was heard in class, not only those who have good verbal English skills
- Required students to read and prepare prior to coming to class

# SOME LEARNINGS

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- As a lecturer I have to balance the needs of all students
- Ensure a maximum level of comprehension of the class material
- Class participation is an important aspect of my teaching and students are encouraged to ask questions, offer opinions, and engage in debate
- Some students are verbal, confident, engaging, and fluent in English
- Disparities often map on to race and class fault lines
- Create classroom conditions that require me to manage discussions

# SOME LEARNINGS

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- Global issues of our time include forced migration, pandemics, social inequality, racism, and gender politics
- I address these in various ways in the Research Methods module
- We examine various research studies and critique their methodology (post-publication review)
- Students are required to read and critique empirical studies and evaluate methodological aspects using the skills they are taught in the module (including my own)
- Exposed to methodological debates about intervention studies in psychology
- Evaluate behaviour change interventions aimed at ameliorating psychological difficulties

# OUTCOME STUDY

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- Interviews were conducted with 10 current Honours students regarding their experiences of the Research Methods 771 module
- Interviews were conducted via MS Teams and were between 20-40 minutes
- Following the interviews, transcripts were generated, and the data was analysed using ATLAS TI version 22

# CHANGED THINKING ABOUT RESEARCH METHODS

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- Altered perspective of Research Methods: Better appreciation for research methodology than prior to the module
- Critical thinking: Not taking claims at face value and appreciating that they need to be supported with empirical evidence
- Importance of acknowledging other perspectives; one's own viewpoint not the only one
- Developing pride and confidence in completing assignment and engaging with peers
- Developing a new vocabulary

# SKILLS

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How to ask a research question

Skills in conducting interviews and data collection

How to keep participants focused on the interview without going on a tangent

Transcription skills

Skills in data analysis

A better ability to understand and appreciate methodology when reading an article

Stepping out of comfort zone in class discussions

Participating in presentations

# WHAT CAUSED THIS CHANGE IN THINKING?

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- Engaging nature of class discussions
- Materials
- Assignment
- Collaborative environment

# MATERIALS

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- Videos explaining how to conduct thematic analysis
- Benefit of doing a Powerpoint presentation and being taught by peers
- Participants found that, when they were the ones presenting, they benefited the most
- Most beneficial when there was an interactive element involved with the presentation
- Voice-over Powerpoint on SL provided overview of content



# MAJOR CLASS ASSIGNMENT

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- Feedback on the assignment was positive
- Appreciated the autonomy of choosing their own research topic
- Found benefit in having a practical assignment to apply to the theory they've learnt
- Challenging but rewarding

# COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Respectful environment allowed students to feel as if they could interact without individuals judging them for their views

Found the debates to be an enriching and stimulating experience in developing different thoughts and perspectives to approaching certain topics

Lecturer stimulated conversations and questions

Experienced in teaching research methods and in the field of psychology

Drew on my own experiences as a researcher



# GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

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- Having an enquiring mind
- Becoming an engaged citizen
- Becoming a dynamic professional
- Becoming a well-rounded individual

# HAVING AN ENQUIRING MIND

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- Sceptical gaze on the world
- Demand for evidence to support claims to truth
- Module is well-suited to students who aspire to developing an inquiring mind
- Provides students with the skills to be lifelong learners
- Constantly able to interrogate knowledge claims
- Apply critical and creative thinking

# BECOMING AN ENGAGED CITIZEN

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- Fake news, pseudoscience, misinformation, and political corruption are rife
- In psychology credibility is sometimes given to evidence-free interventions
- Being able to evaluate claims to truth is a vital attribute to becoming an engaged citizen
- Suspicion of authority and of authoritarian epistemologies so that students can become engaged citizens who speak back to authority when necessary
- Can form the basis of leadership skills and equip students to collaborate and engage with others
- Social engagement allows people to be effective in a diverse environment at university and beyond

# BECOMING A DYNAMIC PROFESSIONAL

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- Intellectual skills students are equipped with enable them to think critically
- A dynamic individual is also an effective problem-solver and creative thinker
- Key attributes to developing the ability to respond to challenges and to be innovative in various environments

# BECOMING A WELL-ROUNDED INDIVIDUAL

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- Scientific literacy can help students become well-rounded individuals
- Able to apply their intellectual skills in all aspects of their lives
- Being able to evaluate evidence is part of an intellectual repertoire
- Scientific literacy provides students with the skills to take responsibility for their lives
- Make personal and professional decisions that are based on the careful evaluation of evidence

# MY VISION

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- Students should be able to imagine a society characterised by egalitarianism, social cohesion, community safety, social justice, and political accountability.
- Intellectually skilled professionals such as the kind produced by universities should be prepared to assume the mantle of leadership in society
- University graduates are involved in administering institutions, managing businesses, entrepreneurship and making government departments function optimally
- An educated and critical citizenry who has critical thinking skills can counter political opportunism, corruption, populism, and demagoguery in society



# CONCLUSION

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- Research methods are not apolitical
- Methodology is contextually embedded and influenced by history, power, and material conditions
- My aim was to bring into focus how technical knowledge of research methods can be applied in the service of a greater social good
- Infuse a social justice agenda

# QUESTIONS?

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