



Exploring the complexity of primary research with lower level pre-sessional students

CLAIRE MURBY & SIMON GOOCH
CELE, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

A brief context ...

- ▶ PEAP 2 – 10 week course, part of year round pre-sessional:



- ▶ Students typically IELTS 5.0, various disciplines, mainly progressing to PG(T) or PG(R) → all likely to do primary research

Encourage students to explore their identity/ies within the context of the 'new' communities (general, academic, CELE/international) they are joining ...

→ largely task-based course - carry out a piece of small scale primary research and produce a research report based on this and their findings



Our session today ...

- ▶ Brief rationale for using primary research in PEAP 2
- ▶ Outline key tasks students work towards over the course
- ▶ Workshop - opportunity for you to look at/analyse some student task outcomes relating to primary research – we want you to evaluate for yourselves how successful this kind of approach might be (preparation for primary research/language)...
- ▶ Draw some of the analysis together, accept suggestions for improvement ...
- ▶ Open out - how might this help contribute to the 'content' of EAP?

Brief rationale for PEAP 2 ...

Why primary research?

'The focus of EAP courses ... will be on a **range of types of knowledge**, including social, **cognitive** and linguistic knowledge, ...' (Bruce 2011:7)

'... acknowledging that within each of these areas there will be considerable variation across particular subject disciplines.' (ibid)

Pre-sessional courses: '... transferable procedural knowledge, rather than topic-connected, discipline-specific knowledge ...' (ibid:8)

Why actually carry it out?

Kolb (1984:38) - learning seen as 'process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience'

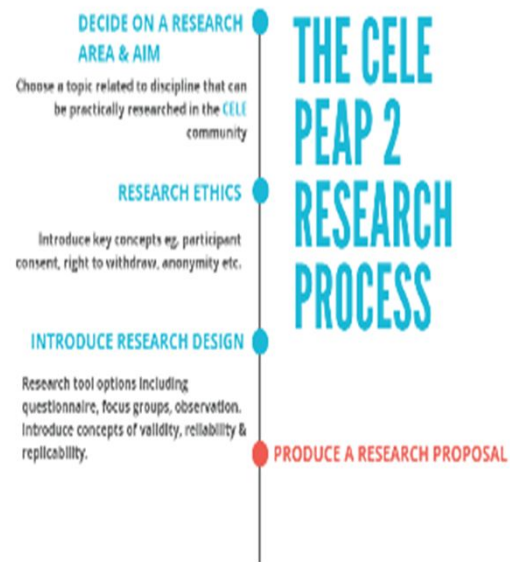
Primary research – ‘transferable procedural knowledge’

- ▶ A distinction between ‘science’ v ‘social sciences’ research
- ▶ Unpacking a research focus
- ▶ Formulating research questions
- ▶ Concept of ‘research design’ and mapping possible research tools onto the research question(s)
- ▶ Understanding ethical issues/practicalities of informed participation
- ▶ Ability to show data visually in appropriate ways
- ▶ Integrate qualitative and quantitative data
- ▶ Identify and interpret findings (e.g. pinpoint evidence for findings, explore possible (non-) correlations, foreground claims when communicating findings, articulate possible implications, draw relevant conclusions etc.)
- ▶ Critically question their investigation and significance or applicability of findings (concepts of validity, reliability, replicability)
- ▶ A distinction between ‘science’ v ‘social sciences’ research

(Bryman 2004; Dörnyei 2007; O’Leary 2017)

Key student tasks – outline (1)

PEAP 2 takes students through the primary research process and shares their work with others in a research report.



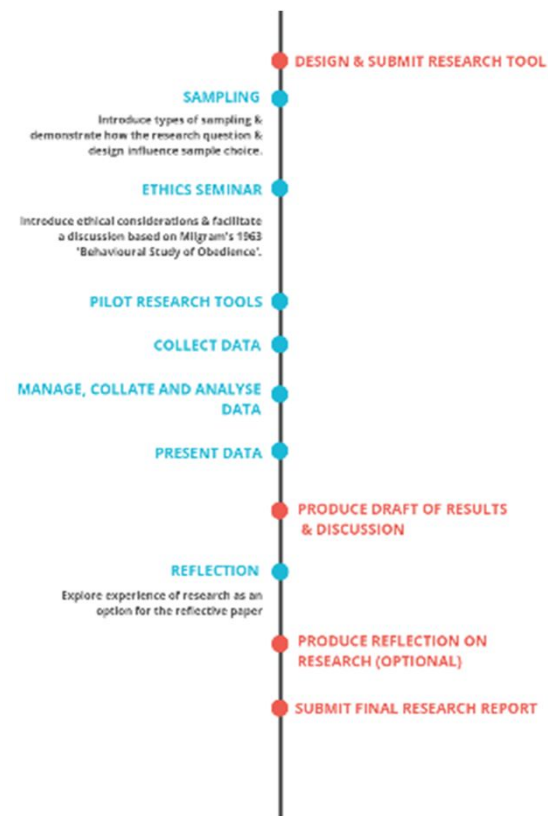


Analysing task outcomes - Task A

Using evidence from the initial student research proposals, briefly discuss:

- ▶ which areas of primary research the students appear to be grappling with
- ▶ how 'authentic' this is from your own experience of carrying out primary research

Key student tasks – outline (2)



Analysing task outcomes - Task B

Using evidence from the student drafts of the discussion section and then the final research report, briefly discuss:

- ▶ which areas of 'primary research procedural knowledge' students appear to have taken on board
- ▶ the extent to which language use has developed to become more appropriate for communicating the content and ideas associated with primary research
- ▶ how 'authentic' this is based on your own experiences

Key student tasks – outline (3)

- VIVA
- PRESENT POSTER

Analysing task outcomes - Task C

Using evidence from extracts of the 2 students' viva and their joint final poster presentation, briefly discuss:

- ▶ which areas of 'primary research procedural knowledge' students appear to have taken on board
- ▶ the extent to which language use has developed to become more appropriate for communicating the content and ideas associated with primary research
- ▶ how 'authentic' this is based on your own experiences

Opening out the issues

- ▶ To what extent does a module like this, with a focus on the carrying out of primary research, serve the purposes of EAP?
- ▶ Can (should?!) the processes, practices and concepts of primary research serve as 'content' knowledge for EAP? Why/not?
- ▶ What opportunities does a module like this provide students with, for e.g. creativity, problem-solving, ownership of what is learnt, independent learning (taking, justifying and reflecting on decisions; time management etc.)
- ▶ What (realistically and practically!) could be added to this module to provide a more discipline-specific awareness of primary research practices?



Conclusions

References

- Bruce, I. (2011) *Theory and Concepts of English for Academic Purposes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Bryman, A. (2004) *Social Research Methods*. (2nd Ed.) Oxford: OUP
- Dörnyei, Z. *Research Methods In Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: OUP
- O'Leary, Z. *Doing your research project*. London: Sage