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Neophyte outdoor education researchers' experiences during Covid-19 restrictions

Professor Heather Prince

Context

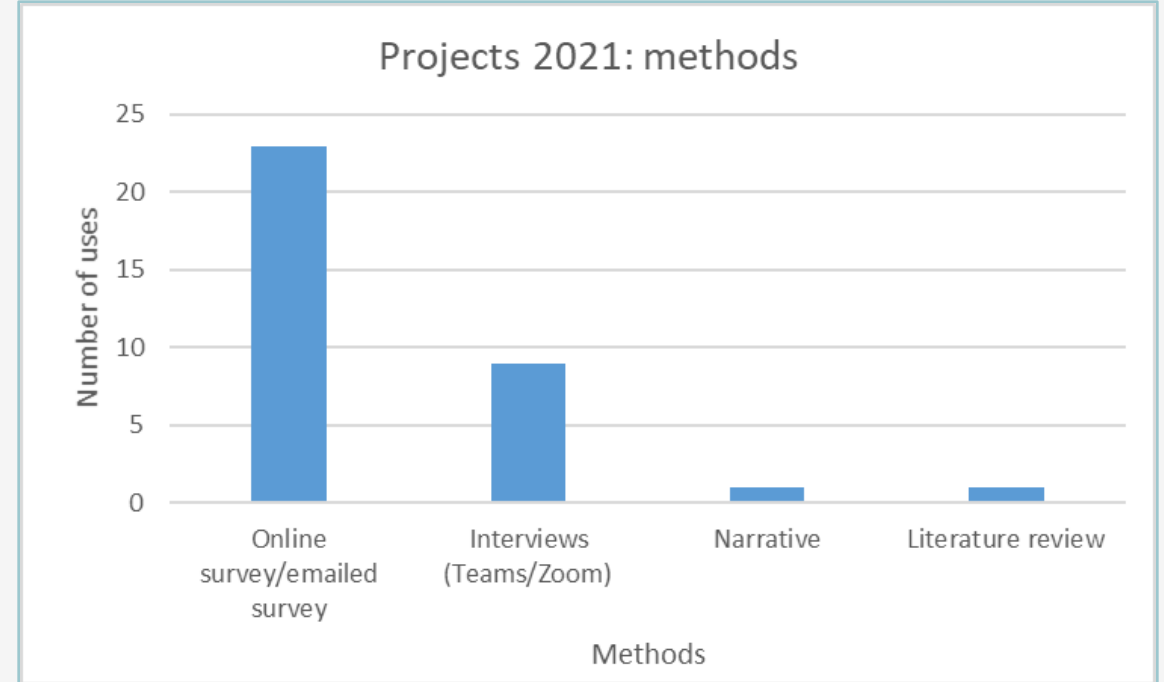
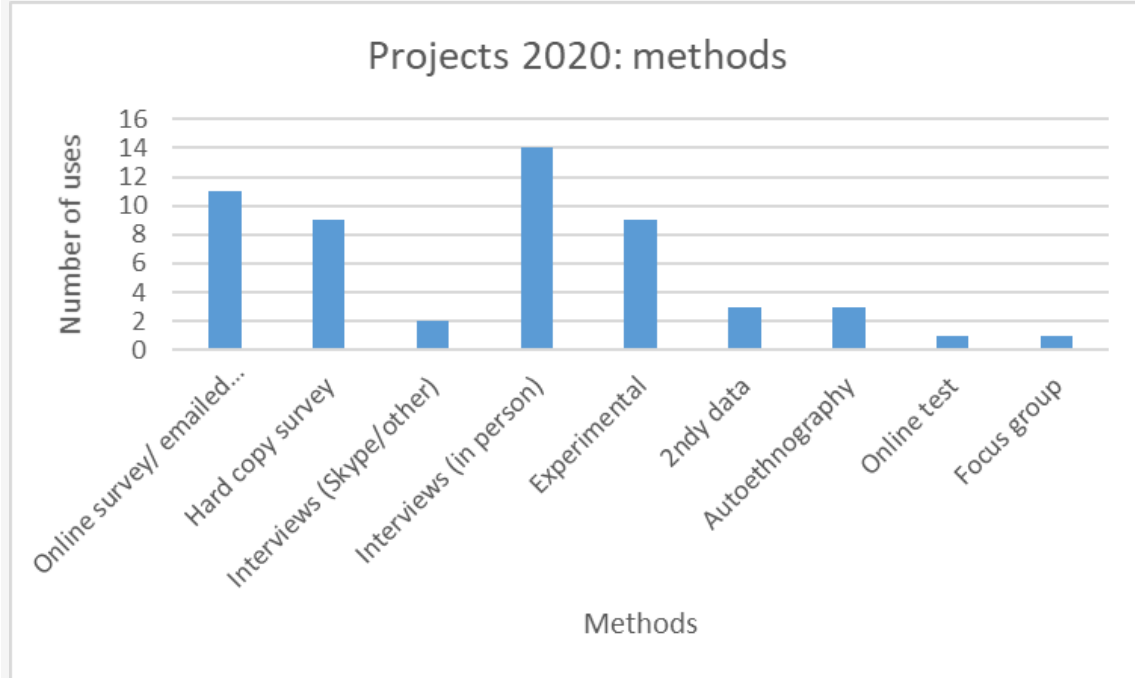
- Second year undergraduate students studying research methods modules, taught online (2021)
- Requirement to complete a small-scale individual research project (2000 – 2500 words)
- No fieldwork, no in person contact due to Covid-19
- Student concerns about collecting sufficient data

Method – analysis of final projects

- Number of methods used
- Approaches to data collection
- Quantity of data

- Marks achieved and compared to 2020 when no restrictions were in place

Results (2020, $n=38$; 2021, $n=27$)



- Fewer methods used in 2021 (methods per student = 1.4 (2020); = 1.26 (2021))
- All virtual/electronic, or secondary sources in 2021
- Move from Skype to Teams/Zoom in 2021

Results (2020, $n=38$; 2021, $n=27$)

Online survey responses

2020

Mean = 46.4

Std Dev = 59.92

(Removing outlier of 211 responses) mean
= 16.64

Online survey responses

2021

Mean = 75

Std Dev = 51.6

(Range 7 – 244)

Marks achieved

2020:

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Mean | 54.61 |
| Median | 52.5 |
| Mode | 40 |

2021:

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Mean | 58.22 |
| Median | 60 |
| Mode | 68 |

+3.6% uplift in mean in 2021

$r_s = +0.363$ (correlation between quantity of data and marks awarded)

Larger std dev for marks achieved using two or more methods

2021 online surveys

- Of all methods used, 64.1% were online surveys
- Students used Googledocs, Microsoft forms, SurveyMonkey, SmartSurveys
- Some free platforms had restrictions on numbers of responses or limited visibility for researchers (of 40, 50, 90, 100)

- Some very impressive response rates in short time (244 on angling in three hours on FB groups (12 angling groups); 114 in nine hours on FB groups (three through-hiking groups))
- Some students restricted data for analysis themselves

Conclusions

- Neophyte researchers have a reflective and reflexive approach to research, particularly when standard, 'traditional' data collection methods are difficult
- They demonstrate resilience and creativity in using familiar technologies (e.g. social media) in becoming researchers themselves
- HE professionals should have the confidence to encourage students to explore different ways of collecting data. Are creative approaches to data collection encouraged by creative/risk taking research staff?
- Encourage neophyte researchers to situate and justify their research in an appropriate paradigm and methodology, and to acknowledge and critique any limitations.

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