Dr. Tim Griebel

Evaluating Interdisciplinary Learning in Critical Digital Political Science

In cooperation with Prof. Dr. Stefan Evert Philipp Heinrich, M.Sc.

Institute of Political Science
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Seminar Concept

Connection between Research and Teaching

Workshop
Texts and Images of Austerity in Britain. A Multimodal Multimedia Analysis

25.09.-29.09.2017

Seminar
Austerität im Vereinigten Königreich. Eine interdisziplinäre Medienanalyse

ab dem WS 2017/18
Critical Realism

- Philosophy of science is essential for every kind of research:
- “In science, Nike notwithstanding, there is no ‘just doing it.’” (Elman/Elman 2002: 232).
### Critical Digital Political Science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Digital</th>
<th>Political Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brings critical theory in contact with the results of digital approaches and with these approaches themselves</td>
<td>Uses methods from the computational sciences (e.g. corpus linguistics)</td>
<td>Is not restricted to a particular institutional domain (e.g. the state) and follows the political goals of human (= also student) emancipation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Digital Political Science

- Critical of “a new era of empiricism” (Kitchin 2014).
- “Critical digital methods [...] do not simply apply large-scale quantitative analysis to [...] data but use smaller samples [...] that are analysed with the help of qualitative methods [...] and interpreted with the help of critical theory.“ (Fuchs 2017: 44)
- Concerned with the “politics of method” (Steinmetz 2005) in general and the “politics of software” (Kitchin and Dodge 2011) in particular.
  - “[A] methodological device can be viewed as an assemblage of material artefacts, human users, practices, ideas and spaces that is constantly subject to change.” (Lupton 2014)
Quantitative methods do neither produce facts nor fictions, but "ficts": "contingent assertions of relations, possible descriptions, sources of speculation and sources for explanation" (Olsen/Morgan: 260)

"We construct as opposed to find our data, but we make it out of something, not of nothing." (Byrne 2002: 15, see also Baker 2006: 11)
### In favour of Human Flourishing

means **aliveness and authentic relatedness** to the world [...] and refers to the **true nature**, the true reality, of a person or a thing in contrast to deceptive appearances” (Fromm 2008: 21).

**Fundamental elements:**

*“to share, to give, to sacrifice”* (Fromm 2008: 86) +

*“productive disposition”, “solidarity and love.”* (Wilde, 2004:171)

### Against Human Flourishing

“This world “is one of **possessing and owning**, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property.” (Fromm 2008: 21)

**Fundamental elements:**

*“competition, antagonism, and fear.”* (Fromm 2008: 91)
Example: Keywords in the Guardian (compared to the Daily Telegraph)

Figure 2: keywords for the Guardian in comparison with the Daily Telegraph
The organisation of keywords/collocates by discourse themes is too crude.

This procedure is untheoretical and misses ambivalences that are addressed by Critical Theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In favour of Human Flourishing</th>
<th>Against Human Flourishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobic ideas “come from a Tory government slashing public services and widening inequality under the dubious banner of austerity. [...] These problems are so systemic today that fixing them will take a radical change to the structure of both our economy and political class (guardian_240616_31)</td>
<td>“’Boosting jobs and investing in human capital is the most promising way of tackling inequality. [...] Investment should target skills and education and thus equip people for the future.’” (guardian_200112_1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concerns → Projects → Practices

Social and cultural structures

Social interaction

Reflexive deliberation

Personal powers

Emancipation

Source: Kahn et al. 2012: 864
Seminar Basis: The BA structure at FAU

- Political science is studied as a dual-subject bachelor (= multidisciplinary structure);
- The BA in Erlangen does **not** include a module for **methods** training;
- The austerity seminar is the **only** (official) **interdisciplinary course** at the BA level;
- Exam regulations
  - restrict methods of examination to one **term paper** and a **presentation** *(the final grade is only based on the term paper)*
  - do **not** provide for **compulsory attendance** (for most students).
Seminar Schedule and Learning Goals

Module 1 (1 day)
1) World-Café: Parts and Praxis of a Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis
2) Meta-Theoretical Reflections about the Building-Blocks of Social Science Research (Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology)
3) Practical Guide to COPweb

Module 2a (1 day)
Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies of Austerity from the Perspective of Social Science Discipline A

Module 2b (1 day)
Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies of Austerity from the Perspective of Social Science Discipline B

Disciplinary Grounding  ↔  Critical Awareness  ↔  Integrative Pluralism

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Seminar Basis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Guardian</th>
<th>Daily Telegraph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of texts</td>
<td>9,048</td>
<td>6,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of tokens</td>
<td>8,936,733</td>
<td>4,890,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LexisNexis (2016)
Search term in the text and/or the caption: “austerity“

Via CQPweb (Evert/Hardie 2011) students can compute
• Concordances
• Collocations
• Keywords
methodology, epistemology and ontology. I think we should guard against 'method-led' research, that is, allowing ourselves to be led by a particular research method rather than 'question-led' research, whereby research questions point to the most appropriate research method. Choosing a research method before having a research question goes against the logic of interconnectedness discussed above and will more than likely result in a poor question/method fit.

Methods themselves should be seen as free from ontological and epistemological assumptions, and the choice of which to use should be guided by research questions. In the minds of many researchers, certain methods are inextricably bound up with certain ontological and epistemological assumptions: for example, try asking an enthusiastic rational choice theorist what he or she thinks of discourse analysis. The important thing to note here is that it is the researcher who employs a particular method in a particular way, thereby associating it with a specific set of ontological assumptions. It is not the method that approaches scholarship with

**Figure 1: The interrelationship between the building blocks of research**

What is a discourse? What’s out there to know? Facts, Fictions, Ficts? What and how can we know about it? How can we go about acquiring that knowledge? Which precise procedures can we use to acquire it? Which data can we collect?

**Texts = „a file of machine readable data“** (McEnery/Hardie 2012: 2

**Source:** Figure adapted from Hay, 2002, p. 64.

Quelle: Grix 2002: 180
Seminar Structure: Module 1b

- Review
- Speculations based on ficts
- Corpus
  - Data Problems, particular time frame/search terms
  - Software Programming & Settings, reference corpus
  - Polysemy
  - Non results, wrong interpretations

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Seminar Structure: Module 2 (CDPS)

- The basic elements of **Critical Digital Political Science** (CDPS) are discussed (again)
- Students present their **research projects** and discuss them with the group. For example, austerity
  - & gender
  - & populism
  - & football
- The discussion is supported by a **political scientist** and a **corpus linguist**.

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### Seminar Goals

<table>
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<th>Critical Awareness</th>
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<td>„In order to successfully contribute to an interdisciplinary team, one has first to be a skilled and experienced disciplinary researcher“ (Bhaskar et al. 2017)</td>
<td>Disciplined are different <em>and</em> connected (Holland 2014). Respect for other disciplines instead of disciplinary or methodological imperialism (Bhaskar et al. 2017)</td>
<td>Students “capacity to take a meta-disciplinary perspective on interdisciplinary work and reflect explicitly about the craft of weaving disciplines together” (Mansilla et al., 2009: 345)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Six survey items form the basis for the discussion of the focus groups. One of them is a question concerning the term paper.
## Evaluation: Term Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disciplinary Grounding</strong></td>
<td>“Are the considered disciplinary theories, examples, findings, methods, and forms of communication accurately employed, or does the work exhibit misconceptions?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrative Pluralism</strong></td>
<td>“Is there evidence that understanding has been enriched by the integration of different disciplinary insights?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Awareness</strong></td>
<td>“Does the work show a clear sense of purpose, framing the issue in ways that invite an interdisciplinary approach?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Is there evidence of reflectiveness about the choices, opportunities, compromises, and limitations involved in interdisciplinary work and about the limitations of the work as a whole?”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Evaluation: Survey

**By visiting the seminar, …**

<table>
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<th>Disciplinary Grounding</th>
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<th>Critical Awareness</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>... I can see the scope and limits of my own discipline more clearly.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>... I feel better equipped to combine different disciplinary perspectives to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>... I feel better equipped to explain the pros and cons of the integration of disciplinary insights.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>... I feel better equipped to grasp the communalities and differences between disciplines.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>... I can better explain the central meaning of knowledge in my own discipline to a person from a different discipline.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>... I feel better equipped to answer a question in an interdisciplinary seminar report.</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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Evaluation: Survey

By visiting the seminar, ...

... I can see the scope and limits of my own discipline more clearly.

... I feel better equipped to combine different disciplinary perspectives to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

... I feel better equipped to explain the pros and cons of the integration of disciplinary insights.

... I feel better equipped to grasp the communalities and differences between disciplines.

... I can better explain the central meaning of knowledge in my own discipline to a person from a different discipline.

... I feel better equipped to answer a question in an interdisciplinary term paper.

N= 10
Drivers for Interdisciplinary Learning

- New insights, break of borders because of the novel setting, fostering of interdisciplinarity as such, teaching by three researchers
- Basic guidance for writing an interdisciplinary term paper based on a corpus
- Manner of the three teachers and positive atmosphere within the seminar
- Interest generating effect on the social environment of the students
# Evaluation: Interviews

## Obstacles for Interdisciplinary Learning

- Students background too homogeneous. Topics too much connected to political issues
- Lack of tutorials and controlled exercises
- One seminar alone cannot break with disciplinary stereotypes and borders
- **Block session structure** hinders continuous learning of complex issues (e.g. use of CQPweb and theoretical terms)
Reminder: Learning from a CR Perspective

Concerns → Projects → Practices

Social and cultural structures
Social interaction
Reflexive deliberation
Personal powers

Source: Kahn et al. 2012: 864
Lessons Learned from a CR perspective (so far)

- It is a good thing to have a common corpus, **but** it has to be further emphasized what that means.
- It is a good thing to have teachers from different disciplines in one seminar, **but** the seminar structure (block sessions) should be changed to allow for more time for reflection between the sessions.
- More resources (not just one seminar) are necessary to teach CDPS.
- **Freedom FROM** something does not necessarily lead to emancipation. Disciplinary measures are necessary to foster emancipation as **freedom TO** do something:  
  - Students‘ awareness of their own active role has to be fostered. (Either voluntarily OR by changing the overall BA structure)
Thank you very much for your attention!