

# Chapter 9 Review: Research That Inspires Creativity

## Research as a creative, knowledge-seeking pursuit

In Chapter 9 titled “*Research that inspires creativity*”, authors Cathy N. Davidson and Christina Katopodis present their exhaustive, well-researched ideas, thoughts and recommendations on research design and methodology, with utmost, astounding clarity. This chapter is primarily intended for research supervisors and instructors who are to assign, evaluate and oversee student capstone projects. This chapter is perfect as an introductory research instructional material and comprehensively adds to our existing knowledge. The chapter is structured and subdivided into the following sections:

- Research That Matters
- Helping Students Choose (and Narrow) a Topic
- Keeping Students Motivated
- Students Will Get Stuck (We All Do): Scheduling Check-Ins
- Sticking to Schedules
- A Public Contribution to Knowledge

As a student myself, I appreciate the numerous, vast variety of practical real-world examples of research projects undertaken and carried out by students that Cathy and Christina cite, not just from their personal experiences with research, but also from instructors from educational institutions across the world. This helps readers recognise the fact that undertaking a research project is in fact, an active learning process, a creative pursuit, and an inventive exploration of ideas, and that it need not merely and necessarily be another assignment.

As a fourth-year student of the five-year Integrated Masters Program in English Language and Literature at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India, I am actively trying to incorporate this

in my own final year project. I love digital media, media psychology and digital culture, and I have been thinking of creative ways to fuse digital media and literature together in my project.

The authors make it a point to remark that the research process isn't "busywork", or another requirement for course completion. Rather, the research process is a "way of gaining tools that will help throughout one's career", that would aid students in acquiring higher-order thinking skills, from them working through the challenges surrounding their research projects.

*In the best instances, the research project helps students move closer to shaping themselves as credible, responsible individuals in response to the never-ending, always evolving life question: "Who are you?" (169)*

The best part of the chapter is the inclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic-oriented experiences, remote/online/hybrid adaptations in relation to research, as textbooks have conventionally explored experiences of in-person classes.

There is also a section later in the chapter titled "Four Ways to Model How to Do Serious Research" that presents four concrete real life illustrations of how research can be modelled. The focus is on making (as the title of the chapter suggests) the students' research process a creative, experiential, explorative, stimulating and unforgettable experience, something that induces and inspires creativity.

The research process is ideally a student's unique and independent contribution and the authors emphasise on making this an opportunity to shape themselves as individuals and help

them grow as people, encouraging curiosity that is inquiry based, that presents multiple possibilities.

*All of the methods for guiding research projects suggested in this chapter are based on the idea that intellectual curiosity is a quality to be nourished and respected. Students matter, and their research matters. We also know that when students present their original research to their peers, they learn even more. Learning-by-teaching is a well-researched subject and has long been used in medical training as an exceptionally effective and efficient method for learning. If students know their hard work will make a difference in the world and will be read by someone and taken seriously, it inspires them, even at the end of a course, a semester, or a frazzled senior year of college or the final year in a graduate or professional program. (194)*

I also love the inclusion of focus on participatory learning in the chapter. As a student, I really appreciate the participatory learning opportunities HASTAC as an organization has given me, such as the annual HASTAC Collaborative Book Reviews that I was a part of last year as well, apart from the HASTAC interviews with authors.

*When basic statistics students in the Open Space Lab at Ca' Foscari University of Venice model the probability of Venice being underwater by 2050, they have not just the tools but the motivation for research across many disciplines that might help their beloved city stay above water—a metaphor and model for research that matters. (173)*

## **Research as a public contribution to knowledge**

The authors express their view that with the right framing, it is quite possible to adapt, develop research projects, surrounding the complexities of today's interconnected networked world, map the connection and association between what is known and what is novel, and yet to be known.

The authors acknowledge the fact that instructors are magnanimously constant multitaskers, and that this ability is what they can demonstrate to students to help them with project-management and staying organized.

*All instructors wear multiple hats, especially adjuncts who sometimes teach at more than one institution, with different term schedules and deadlines. Given our experiences managing our multiple roles as teachers, researchers, and university citizens, we can be excellent models for our students when we show them the tools we use to stay organized (and sane). (185)*

The authors cite what architect Ann M. Pendleton-Jullian and computer scientist and entrepreneur John Seely Brown have to say in their work:

*In Design Unbound: Designing for Emergence in a White Water World, architect Ann M. Pendleton-Jullian and computer scientist and entrepreneur John Seely Brown raise the stakes, arguing that we need new ways of teaching if we are going to prepare students for what they call a "white water world" that is in constant rapid change and*

*complexly connected. They write: “We all recognize that we are becoming much more global and urban, meaning there is greater diversity in closer proximity. And we are increasingly vying for resources that are more limited every day. . . . The result is we are engaged in a whole new set of issues and conflicts that are without a clear resolution or end state.” They argue that we need new ways of learning to imbue students with the confidence to tackle increasingly complex and fraught conditions. (176)*

The emphasis in this chapter is on research as a public contribution to knowledge, something that is very consequential, truly matters and is not perfunctory.

*We believe the purpose of higher education goes beyond students earning grades that add up to a diploma. Their hard work on research that matters deserves a better audience, as does our constructive feedback. We strongly advocate for research that has an audience beyond the instructor, research that makes a contribution to the public in some way. (187)*

Another aspect of this chapter that I liked is the addition of examples of multimodality, especially when they cite the following examples to elaborate on how innovation, especially in today’s digital age, can be modelled using multimodal public tools such as ArcGIS :

*We can model innovation by using multimodal public tools as well. K–12 and higher ed teachers from all over the world use the*

*technology provided by the Finnish education and media company ThingLink to create an unlimited number of interactive lesson plans for free. Instructional technology coach Ornella Cappuccini created a virtual house tour at the Istituto Comprensivo Rovereto Est in Italy to teach her students German. Professor Barbara Antoniel at the Andrea Scotton Technical Institute in Bassano designed a virtual tour based on the novel Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse to immerse her literature students in a flipped classroom experience. Proving that online learning materials do not need to be dull, difficult, or expensive, these educators break the mold when it comes to presenting their lessons online, providing a perfect model for students to do the same. Students can design StoryMaps using Esri's ArcGIS or create other interactive presentations using Neatline. Ideally, they will have an example to follow from their professor's multimodal presentations. (188)*

However, I would mention here that I would have loved to see more instances of international collaborations happening between research groups, especially those that happened during the pandemic, as it was a time when the entire world took to remote learning and teaching. I would have loved to see what collaborative and innovative methods were adopted by teachers and instructors across the world with respect to online learning.

## **Supporting healthy research practices : Some practical recommendations**

Sections such as “Keeping Students Motivated”, “Students Will Get Stuck (We All Do):

Scheduling Check-Ins”, and “Sticking to Schedules” detail how instructors can be caring and

supportive towards students. Students learn and do best research when they are motivated and feel supported.

*The research project is a time when care is especially important. It is all too easy for students to become overwhelmed, lost, or paralyzed by the thought of an original research project. This all-important final capstone project (whether research paper, thesis, or dissertation) often comes at a monumental time of personal transition, right as students are thinking ahead to moving from the ordered world of college, graduate school, or professional school to the open-ended and anxiety producing challenges of finding a first (or next) job or taking a step toward promotion in their chosen career. (182)*

For instructors, mentoring students with projects means directing them to focus on the journey and not just the end-product of research. The authors thus emphasise on the role of instructors in supporting students with best practices in project management (such as using Gantt charts for time and project management aside from effective progress mapping), along with other tips (such as giving constructive feedback) to help students manage projects in order to give them the support they truly need, as acknowledging the accomplishment of every step taken helps students feel cared and supported for, help them (re)gain confidence. Collaborative teams can be advantageous as they allow students to recognize each other's skills and appreciate differences, and make the best out of their existing differences. To help students build on previous work, and encourage them to devise research arguments, instructors could support them with a list of prompts. Peer-to-peer work, interviews, office hours, would help students create, ideate, and work towards building a research proposal.

The authors also present their individual classroom experiences with research. Cathy mentions how using “the traditional journalistic template to flesh out their topic: “5Ws+H,” or “Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How” before pitch meetings (where ideas are pitched, proposed), helps students narrow down their research arguments. Christina mentions how using the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method, inspired from the business and finance world, helps “students narrow their topics while also establishing stakes for their projects”.

Overall, this chapter offers an incredible assortment of recommendations, suggestions for supporting passionate and better research practices. Cathy and Christina’s dedication and passion for research comes through and indispensably becomes well-evident in their writing. This chapter is positively, and definitely an important-read for learners in terms of the extensive array of inputs, pointers and key-takeaways that I could pick up from reading it.

## **References**

Davidson, Cathy N, and Christina Katopodis. “Research That Inspires Creativity.” *New College Classroom*, Harvard University Press, 2022.