

**Creating *On Method*: Translating Scholarly Research on Methods**

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**ABSTRACT**

*On Method* is a collaborative knowledge-translation project that combines critical pedagogy with arts and independent-filmmaking production strategies to develop compelling video content for researchers. In this article, the authors analyze four key principles of research translation contributing to the successful creation of *On Method*, a nine-episode video textbook that explores key concepts and approaches in qualitative methods. The principles include how to assemble a strong team; how iteration works in this context; the collaborative nature of the process; and building content for varied audiences. *On Method* aims to update previous media-based approaches to education by showcasing a primarily virtual production process that generated rich content to attract media-savvy audiences to a consideration of qualitative methods in the digital sphere and to build critical thinking in the public sphere.

**RÉSUMÉ**

*On Method* est un projet collaboratif d'application des connaissances qui associe la pédagogie critique à des stratégies de production artistique et cinématographique indépendante afin de développer un contenu vidéo qui soit attirant pour les chercheurs. Dans cet article, les auteurs analysent quatre principes clés de l'application de la recherche qui ont contribué à la réussite de *On Method*, un manuel vidéo en neuf épisodes qui explore les principaux concepts et approches des méthodes qualitatives. Ces principes sont : la constitution d'une équipe solide, l'utilité de l'itération dans ce contexte, la valeur d'une approche collaborative, et la création d'un contenu ciblant des publics variés. La série *On Method* vise à mettre à jour les approches médiatiques antérieures envers l'éducation en se fondant sur un processus de production essentiellement virtuel qui a généré un contenu riche dans le but de motiver les publics versés dans les médias à réfléchir sur les méthodes qualitatives dans la sphère numérique. *On Method* vise en outre à contribuer à la pensée critique dans la sphère publique.

**Keywords / Mots clés :** knowledge translation, collaborative methods, critical pedagogy, scholarly media production, narrowcast audiences / application des connaissances, méthodes collaboratives, pédagogie critique, production médiatique savante, publics ciblés

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## Introduction

This is an era of seemingly endless possibilities for creative thinking about how knowledge is generated, transferred, and translated from one domain to others. *On Method* is a digital video textbook that explores key concepts and approaches in qualitative methods through a series of nine episodes.<sup>1</sup> Using this series as the basis of this article, we seek to illustrate how scholarship can move from one mode of engagement to another by shifting from written journal articles, lectures, or textbooks to YouTube-style videos and recount how one radically open-ended trans-sector team worked collaboratively across areas of academic and artistic expertise to help build robust creative scholarly outputs.<sup>2</sup> We describe the development of this video series, complicated by various contingencies of working during a pandemic, to highlight four principles for producing work that has a better chance of traveling across various domains to reach multiple types of audiences.

In the case we describe below, we conducted a deliberate experiment in *form* alongside an experiment in *practice*, using transdisciplinary collaboration to translate knowledge in a plurality of ways. At the methodological level, this experiment involved untethering scholarly research-methods content from the bonds of a methodology textbook to create a series of short videos in the style of MasterClass, a commercial platform that features professional production values in short instructional videos on a wide variety of topics suitable for dissemination on YouTube, in the classroom, or on television.<sup>3</sup> To that end, the *On Method* videos were on the high end of professional production quality: each was expertly scripted, shot with multiple cameras, directed to build strong narrative lines and compelling performances, edited, and augmented with animation graphics and catchy titles.

At the epistemological level, the process itself was transformative. Our team members came from different disciplines, and while we all had experience in collaborating on multidisciplinary teams, we were also working in isolation and at vast distances during a global pandemic. Even more telling, as a team, we found that through the process of attempting to develop compelling content, we also shifted from the notion of a singular public into the idea of narrowcast audiences, as we discuss below, who might be interested in and willing to take a look at this content. This shift prompted us to adopt multiple, overlapping perspectives as well as to take on varied roles to complete the work. In this context, we developed and iteratively tested new ways of accomplishing tasks and saying things in different ways. This case is not simply a process of using media producers to convey scholarship in a comprehensible and accessible format through talking-head video lectures that can be distributed widely for educational purposes, although there is an element of this approach in the final series. Rather, the experience supports the idea that interdisciplinary teams can build something that is different from what any individual researcher, creative worker or discipline might envision because they activate multiple ways of knowing and they can translate their work effectively for a variety of environments—and audiences. This article highlights and shares what we found to be crucial during this creative research and production project.

## Media-based education and critical pedagogy as knowledge translation

We begin by situating the *On Method* project within the Canadian, American, and

Danish educational contexts because the latter have had a particular influence on our understanding and imagination of the possibilities for teaching and learning outside of formal educational institutions in connection with various forms of media production and the notion of education as promoting democratic values. We then consider how critical pedagogy provides a strong ethical framework for knowledge translation in that it shifts the focal point from the researcher's knowledge to engagement and interaction in specific cultural contexts as a mode of academic and creative collaboration. We then propose and illustrate a model of four knowledge-translation principles crucial to the success of the project.

The use of media in education has a long history, including learning through radio, television programs, and recordings sent through the mail, and more recently, through various digital platforms, culminating in the explosion of best practices discussions about online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (see for example Daniel, 2020). Our own experiences with Canadian, American, Danish, and global online contexts influenced how we initially framed this project. In Canada, using media production as a way to document and educate a broad audience, and thereby to activate civic dialogue about social justice, has deep foundations. For example, the Challenge for Change program, initiated in the 1960s by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), documented social issues on behalf of the people most affected by them (Waugh, Winton & Baker, 2010). Such early efforts established radio and TV as key contributors to educational goals outside the formal education system. In 1969, this situation evolved to encompass a more formal relationship between education systems and broadcasters on a province-by-province basis, with Radio-Québec (now Télé-Québec) set up to support education; in 1970, it was TVOntario in 1970 (and La Chaîne française in 1987); and in 1980, it was the Knowledge Network in British Columbia (McNulty, 2013). All these channels are still used in the educational system as a complement to standard curriculum requirements. Additionally, the public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), has frequently been involved in education through some of its programs as well as its educational sales division, which develops curriculum supports and sells products to various boards of education across the country.

In the United States, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) lays claim to a strong educational mandate. The American network describes itself as “America’s largest classroom, the nation’s largest stage for the arts and a trusted window to the world” (PBS.org/About), and a partner organization to National Public Radio (NPR.org; Jarvik, 1998). From the start (in 1969), PBS was regionalized and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a non-profit corporation created by the United States Congress through the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (47 USC 396 of the Communication Act). CPB still provides some funding to PBS. The PBS *modus operandi* of selling content and curriculum supports to boards of education emerged at the same time as a similar model did for Canada’s educational broadcasters such as TVOntario and the educational division of the CBC.

As for Denmark, it has a strong practice and a long history of non-formal adult education programs and opportunities, grounded in the philosophy that citizens have a right to seek out educational opportunities and to be educated. The national government

supports thousands of initiatives and organizations to build knowledgeable citizens. The Ministry of Culture has clarified that the purpose of such initiatives is:

To promote an understanding of democracy and active citizenship and, based on the education on offer, to increase participants' general and professional insight and skills. The aim is to strengthen individuals' ability and desire to take responsibility for their own lives and to participate actively and committedly in society. (Denmark, 2011)

This statement echoes similarly ambitious democratizing mandates embedded in the policy frameworks for public broadcasting in Canada and the United States.

The digital sphere has presented a different scale for thinking about public education, outside nation-state parameters. From the mid-1990s onwards, the internet provided an opportunity to rethink national educational media programming and objectives because of greatly expanded programming time, colloquially known as “shelf space” in the media sector (e.g., Avery, 2007; Balas, 2007; Luka, 2014). But the “long tail” of education (Anderson, 2006) is not only globally distributed, it can also be programmed in ways that are specific to particular interest groups, traveling across borders, disciplines, and levels of expertise, as demonstrated by YouTube's channel structure. The internet as a platform, including the emergence and spectacular growth of streaming services (Zboralska & Davis, 2017), is also largely unregulated and is therefore not held behind traditional advertiser-funded editorial gates. This means that assessments about the reliability of content rely primarily on crowd-based criteria, often of popularity (e.g., YouTube) or of curation by individuals or companies (e.g., film festivals, Vimeo, or the Khan Academy). In such times, when all sorts of platforms and stakeholders are part of everyday teaching and learning, it becomes crucial for various experts to contribute to the general flow of information and education in the informal spheres of YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, or whatever the latest platform is for sharing and learning. Such conditions have particular implications for scholars with an interest in promulgating critical pedagogies across these platforms.

*On Method* emerged as a thought experiment to consider how knowledge that is typically thought of as mundane and very narrow might be positioned in ways that make it more legible and intriguing for wider audiences. That is, words like “method” and “methodology,” which are jargon terms outside—and even within—academic settings, can seem foreign or intimidating on the one hand, or boring on the other. Even so, coauthor Annette Markham had many years of success in talking about methods in specialized higher-education contexts.

As the global pandemic influenced this project, *On Method* evolved into a more hands-on experiment to build on these traditional modes of thinking about education as a form of public or audience engagement as well as on critical interventionist thinking about the purpose of education in a broader sense. The critical interventionist legacy we drew on is critical pedagogy: a politics and practice of using pedagogical and participatory engagement tools to raise critical consciousness about an issue of concern in a particular context. As Markham (2019) notes, although the term originated with Paolo Freire's work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), it was a common practice in the fem-

inist consciousness-raising circles of the 60s and 70s to build awareness of patriarchal patterns in society (Sarachild, 1978). Critical pedagogy could be considered a deliberate form of provoking participants to engage in reflexive thinking and then working with them to continue this process of self-teaching. Ideally, this practice of helping citizens build their own critical consciousness shifts over time from mere awareness to action. As Antonio Gramsci (1971 [1937]) emphasized, the first step is learning to become aware of the conditions of structural oppression that hide beneath the surface of everyday institutional practices. He argued that, by understanding that hegemonic forces were in play as forms of “control through consent,” common people would be able to find means of resisting them.

This particular project, supported by Aarhus University, is grounded in a similar effort to revive critical pedagogy as a way of enhancing the public’s comprehension of and response to the increasing digitalization and datafication of everyday life (we discuss the complications of using a notion like “the public” below). Such an approach requires not only providing information and opportunities for people to learn methods and tools that can enable them to research their own lived experiences more effectively, but also doing the work of translating complicated knowledge about the practice of sociology or social inquiry into meaningful information or techniques that can be applied to everyday inquiry.

A significant challenge to facilitating critical pedagogy in the public sphere is that the audiences or participant groups can be diverse and unpredictable. In the *On Method* project, while the team could have aimed the educational design quite narrowly, the goal was for the material to be comprehensible to as many people as possible. Practices of producing material for and through social media helped us grapple with this challenge. If we consider how informal education happens through TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube, we see certain style and form patterns emerge that reflect a strong pedagogical sensibility, an ability for flexible adaptation, and positions of authority that continuously shift and are not singular but emergent over time in flows that involve more than the individual. Some of the earliest academic research bloggers, such as Jill Walker Rettberg (2013), emphasized the value of maintaining informality in presenting ideas, knowing that they were not fully fleshed out as would be the case in longer peer-reviewed academic essays. At the same time, bloggers—and later, people micro-videoblogging through Snapchat or TikTok—would not maintain a viewership if they did not also present ideas in ways that were clear and understandable, which are qualities that emerge from a pedagogical sensibility. When we read Jill Walker Rettberg’s jill/txt blog or watch Casey Fiesler on TikTok, they are informative and instructional in cycles that are not overtly structured in ways that emphasize the transmission of specialized knowledge. Rather, they invite us into learning more about how they are thinking or how they came to know something. Even though they are producing content on highly complex or specialized topics, they situate this in the styles appropriate to their respective platforms and, in both cases, foreground what they are doing as a form of storytelling. In their knowledge-translation practices, Fiesler and Rettberg often follow a pattern that feels like they are saying, “I’ve been researching this for a long time, and here’s a thought.” Like many YouTube instructional videos, their stories have the characteristic of being both authoritative, as in “I’ve been researching this for a long time,” and open and casual, with the “And here’s a thought,” which can invite readers/viewers to offer subsequent thoughts.



This is only one example of many vernaculars that are likely operating in a single instance of informal digital tutorials on social media (humor is another very common pattern, as elaborated by Limor Shifman [e.g., 2007]). Whether strategic or coincidental, these elements enable readers/viewers to recognize that the tutorials are works in progress. And different vernaculars are combined, drawing on various traditions for gaining and holding attention, teaching, or connecting with people. Broadly speaking, these vernaculars witnessed through various types of informal information in our newsfeeds comprise the seeds for exactly the multidisciplinary approaches that can activate critical pedagogy for more people by making it legible through different lenses.

As the project evolved, we realized that our specific transdisciplinary collaboration combined multiple epistemologies, multiple areas of expertise with regard to production, and many vernacular communication experiences. Also, producing material for streaming has the potential to reach greater numbers of people. The important feature to consider in such media production is not simply producing it for streaming but considering how the material is contextualized, and taking multiple routes to curating it before it enters overlapping networks and information flows that are, for the most part, uncontrollable. These interventions do not occur in traditional pedagogical settings, or even physically situated public engagements, where a facilitator or scholar might be present to answer questions or explain key points. Multiple layers emerge as one works within the form of digital platforms, as well as the style or genre within presentations. All of these elements function to encase and situate the main content. To add opportunities to deepen the experience, ancillary materials can later be linked to the videos.

Considering the *On Method* production, not only within the frameworks of media-based education and critical pedagogy but also within the newer frameworks of informal knowledge translation via social media, necessitates an openness to how knowledge is transformed as well as translated. This is a critical point, since in our case the specific public or audiences at whom the content is being aimed remain unclear. This lack of clarity is not an oversight but a part of the design, embracing a feature of contemporary overlaps of social networks whereby anyone could stumble upon content.

Drawing on this perspective, what combination of elements in the knowledge-translation process could accommodate or enable this uncertain and potentially broad reach and impact? If the collaborative process is nurtured in a mindful way, different ideas can emerge on what counts as knowledge, how we come to know something, and the larger situations within which knowledge production and sharing happen. In the case of the *On Method* team, the differences between our creative and scholarly practices (which include among others animation, digital data analysis, ethnography, filmmaking, gardening, graphic design, photography, remix theory, sculpture, sociology, and television production, all of which are epistemologies that we incorporated into the series) are quite significant. To capitalize on, rather than minimize, these distinctions requires remaining open to the possibility that each of these practices and interests might transform the material, building new albeit “in progress” forms of translation and engagement.

Bringing these epistemologies together was not about collapsing or consolidating them, or working without a plan. Rather, it was about enabling each distinctive way of knowing to inform the shape and content of the end result. Allowing all the epistemologies to surface within practices of research translation required attention to different aspects of group work. Under the circumstances, the collaboration was not just about joining forces, or acknowledging differences while working together, even if in some situations these actions might be sufficient. In this case, we recognized additional benefits, including paying attention to what was involved, epistemologically speaking, at each stage (scripting, shooting, editing, animating, reshooting, etc.). Circumstances motivated us to rely on contributions from everyone in the group, and to make the content more comprehensible to diverse groups of people.

### Principles as process: *On Method* as knowledge translation

To begin the project, coauthor Annette Markham assembled a team of collaborators who were experts in small-unit media and collaborative arts production and in creative, community-engaged methods to translate Markham's expertise into short videos for varied audiences. By the end of the process, *On Method* had evolved into nine episodes as listed in table 1.

**Table 1: *On Method* episode titles, lengths, and descriptions**

Episode (length)	Title	Focus
01 (5 mins)	Introduction: <i>On Method</i>	How Markham became involved in researching online/digital life; methods used to study this field.
02 (8:44)	Framing Method	Markham uses the metaphor of framing to demonstrate how researchers' values, approaches and findings are shaped by their worldview, and therefore how understanding that worldview can help challenge assumptions and biases.
03 (9:38)	Citizen Science (Digital Ethnography)	This episode reveals how individuals can follow various easy-to-do ethnographic approaches to research their own lives and to understand their own consumption habits, lifestyle, and values.
04 (10:37)	Sherlock Holmes: Thick Description	By using a well-known character and approach, Markham demonstrates how ideas about forensic investigation can lead to both deductive and inductive research results.
05 (11:49)	Ethics as Method	This episode focuses on researchers' responsibilities and the power dynamics of choices made during data definition, collection, analysis, and dissemination.
06 (5:49)	Serendipity	This visually compelling episode breaks with the talking-head format to use cooking skills as a metaphor for becoming an accomplished researcher.
07 (12:33)	Situational Mapping	This episode reviews visually oriented methods to break open meaning, challenge assumptions, and document relationships in data management and analysis.
08 (12:21)	Notes (Reflexive Field Notes)	Markham shows and modifies classic field-note processes to demonstrate how to break down social interactions, in-person and online, in familiar and unfamiliar situations.
09 (9:04)	Making Data (Constant Comparison)	This video deals with constant comparison as a qualitative method to document and recognize patterns in data analysis and management.

Below, we use four principles to document and reflect at a meta level on what happened in the *On Method* production process. Even though the process is not reducible to a toolkit, we believe that similar projects could benefit from following these principles. As we reflect on this approach, it is evident that this is a particular, not universal, combination of principles: they were useful for our project, but they could also be modified for other projects as a heuristic guide for development. Indeed, examining principles from disparate epistemological frameworks can help teams build a strong set of guidelines to expand or transform scholarly communication for different audiences.

The four key principles we observed, developed, adapted, and documented throughout the project include:

1. Assemble people who offer different/distinctive epistemologies and methodologies for knowledge translation;
2. Conduct deliberate processes of iteration and internal testing;
3. Acknowledge logistic demands, temporal differences across disciplines, and be aware of “glitches”;
4. Refine with (narrowcast) audience(s) in mind and prepare to test deliberately and externally.

Our confidence in these principles is heightened by our previous experiences, when we separately used some combination of these principles, such as bringing in people with diverse but highly professional skill sets and creative approaches (e.g., Luka & Lilley, 2018, for a five-year community-engaged public art project; Rettmer, 2021, for the production of an opera); enabling different types of expertise to inform the process, which resulted in public-facing critical-pedagogy experiments (e.g., Markham, 2019, for a public art and memory project); incorporating deliberate iterative design involving multiple stakeholders and disciplines, or using a charismatic host to carry a difficult project forward (e.g., Luka, 2018, for a public art initiative; Luka, Markham, & Harris, 2021, for an international creative and autoethnographic engagement with almost 200 people; Markham & Pereira, 2019, for a public art and memory project). This article is intended to help others evaluate their own capacity for successfully carrying out similar projects.

#### FIRST PRINCIPLE: ASSEMBLE PEOPLE WHO OFFER DISTINCTIVE EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGIES FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

*Assemble a team whose members have different and distinctive epistemologies and methodologies that they use for knowledge and research translation. Ensure that each contributor has strong skills that they are not afraid to use and can talk about how to use their skills and others' in multiple ways.*

This principle is a central feature of many of the collaborative models for research that we have noted above, but it is not always easy to practice, since “strong skills” and “not afraid” can be misinterpreted as “too strong” or “controlling.” In the case of our initial team (Luka, Markham, & Rettmer), even though we all had significant experience working in such teams and we also had previously worked together in some ways, we paid attention to and continually reshaped how this dynamic was emerging and evolving. Annette Markham, a Professor of Media and Communication at RMIT University in Australia and a well-known methodology expert in internet and digital communica-



tion studies, brought content-level expertise to the table as well as the gravitas of her many years of translating scientific research into engaging curriculum design and her experience in performative lectures. Laine Rettmer directed the series development, drawing on expertise as an award-winning media artist, opera director, experimental filmmaker, actor, and Assistant Professor at Rhode Island School of Design in the United States. Wearing these hats (and swapping them frequently), Rettmer brought a laser focus to directing on-camera performances and to video editing. They also created the distinctive sound signatures in the series. Mary Elizabeth Luka, an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto in Canada, who has researched ethics and practices in creative and scholarly ecosystems, contributed her longstanding and award-winning media-industry expertise in producing, directing, and editing experimental and interventionist arts documentaries for the internet and television. Luka used her knowledge of the scholarly work of the host, which she combined with expertise in the beats and structures of media producing and scheduling, to play key roles in script and creative development during preproduction, production, and postproduction. These roles included scaling production protocols and “notes” (requested changes to the final product) to the budget and imagined audiences.

For this project, we also selected the fourth and fifth team members on the basis of previous work done with them and careful pre-screening. Andrea Merckx, an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Pratt School of Design in the United States, is an animator, visual artist, curator, and scenic and video designer for a range of traditional and experimental productions. This background enabled Merckx to create and deploy visually enlivening elements for what could have otherwise simply been a talking-heads series. Because of COVID-related travel restrictions during the shooting process, a fifth team member, David Yin, contributed his videographer expertise from Australia to accomplish the primary unit shoot, acting as director of photography, key grip (lighting), camera operator, and assistant editor.

To build momentum and to practice this principle of challenging each other while minimizing friction among experts, we started with the most playful piece of the series. The scholarly content of this piece was the most broadly comprehensible: how doing research was like being a detective, an episode we initially called “Being like Sherlock Holmes.” While Markham had conceived of this metaphor long before the project began, it evolved greatly as the whole team drew on their own knowledge of Sherlock Holmes and forensic detective tropes in popular culture.

As the team developed this idea into a polished product, Markham’s original comparison between research methods and detective work was significantly transformed by everyone. This change is evident in the script, the editing, and also the graphic design of the episode, which highlighted different aspects of the metaphor than had been originally envisioned. As the four of us toyed with the metaphor of the forensic detective, we were also elaborating a shorthand way for communicating complex ideas with each other. This process influenced how we acted as a team for the rest of the project.

For example, we started with Markham’s thinking about ethnographic research as a “forensic investigation approach” that researchers from diverse disciplines could easily

understand through the metaphor of various TV personalities' interpretation of how detectives like Sherlock Holmes investigate murders. Merckx, captivated by Markham's incidental use of the phrase "Research begins with some sort of 'dead body,'" started inserting playful graphics of dead bodies in the draft video product. This metaphor of "searching for dead bodies" became a stand-in for understanding variations in what "research data" might mean and how one's disciplinary training might leave "finger-prints." In essence, while each person on the team contributed professional processes necessary to create a polished media production, building around an easily understood and playful theme of research as detective work helped them recognize that their skills also *overlapped*, which enabled the team members to cross over into other areas of the work process to help out when needed, contribute critical analysis, give fresh and informed insights into drafts, and engage in lively debate.

The challenge in combining high levels of expertise with extensive or award-winning experience in disparate domains is that individual visions can take over or egos can become involved in controlling the process. Luka and Markham's comfort with facilitating group processes enabled expertise to flourish, but with an open-endedness towards the content and the shape of the final product that encouraged processes that kept moving forward rather than stalling in key moments of debate. This approach was systematized through the second principle of the project: iterative design.

#### SECOND PRINCIPLE: CONDUCT DELIBERATE PROCESSES OF ITERATION AND INTERNAL TESTING

*Collaborative content production and development require input at various levels from many members of the team, ideally in a series of iterative engagements with the material. Iterative processes build quality over time as different elements are revisited, tweaked, and retested from various perspectives on the team, not just once but repeatedly.*

Iterative design is an unusual setup for scripted film production, which is most often planned in advance and tightly controlled. However, it is well aligned with experimental and *cinéma vérité* documentary filmmaking. In ethnographic research environments and even experimental science labs, emergent and iterative thinking and design are more common. Iteration involves more reviewing and revisiting than the process of one person writing words on a page, another reading them, and a third shooting the scene. Iteration requires flexibility and a willingness to let the project emerge in a different way than might have been envisioned and to engage in continuous rethinking even as the project is moving forward.

The *On Method* collaborative process followed a deliberately nonlinear and iterative approach, creating a pattern of development and production where all team members had significant input into the meaning and form of the final message. Developing a vision, script, and product around Markham's long-discussed concept of "frames" (2005) presents a good example of how iterative processes work as both tweaking the design of an existing vision or product, as is common in design practice, and changing direction altogether as the product emerges from the collaborative process. The idea of frames started as a metaphor used by Markham in certain lectures and keynotes in

which she emphasized how one's research methods are "framed" by various political, social, or disciplinary norms and tacit everyday practices. Months before *On Method* began, Luka identified this concept as a good foundation for a full episode. However, after several attempts to write a script, Markham realized that she could not separate the topic of "frames" from other topics. It was re-envisioned (in an iterative discussion loop) as one of three topics that would comprise a single episode on "Tools of Analysis." This time, Markham's inability to simplify content prompted Luka and Rettmer to experiment with a new technique to get Markham to generate a script by recording her informally answering questions in a video call and then auto-transcribing these (in an iterative scripting loop). In these interview-style Zoom meetings, Luka asked questions relevant to the topic at hand while Markham responded by making extended remarks or reading from previously written materials. Meanwhile, Rettmer intervened out of curiosity or for clarity and precision on particular details or approaches. Next, Markham, Luka, and Rettmer edited the transcripts for use as the basis for condensing them into a script.

The central point about frames continued to evolve as Luka edited the script before and during the shoot, and as Rettmer's video-editing emphasized something different from what Markham had originally intended. This iterative process became even more evident as the animator highlighted the visual aspects of frames and framing. In late 2021, taking advantage of being together for a few days at a workshop, the team members shot new footage to support the animation effect of drawing frames against the background of nature. The idea of a "picture frame" shifted from an image on a PowerPoint slide to an animation over a landscape of lichen and rock. This idea was then incorporated into a discussion of how one tends to build boundaries around knowledge. These iterative loops showcase the important role of coincidence and serendipity in knowledge-translation processes.

### THIRD PRINCIPLE: ACKNOWLEDGE LOGISTICAL DEMANDS, ACCOMMODATE TEMPORAL DIFFERENCES ACROSS DISCIPLINES, AND BE AWARE OF "GLITCHES"

*A core but underlying principle of effective collaboration towards knowledge translation is that each team member will have something specific to offer epistemologically and logistically. Everyone will need to be flexible and generous in recognizing what their teammates have to contribute. Over time, this give-and-take attitude yields a communal project, emblematic of what a "community of practice" should represent (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Markham, Luka, & Harris, 2021). More pointedly, this approach sets up the potential for serendipity and "glitches" to become productive elements of the project.*

The situation surrounding this project required significant generosity or a give-and-take attitude, which serendipitously advanced a strong communal practice. Serendipity (which is, incidentally, explained in the "Serendipity" episode) is not simply a happy accident; rather, it is a potential outcome of paying attention to moments that can become opportunities and then having the skill and willingness to take advantage of them. Struggling to accomplish this project during a global pandemic presented us with these opportunities. As we enacted workarounds, we built a flexibly skilled team. Let us give an example. It was obvious before it began that the

project would require an intense time period to develop scripts and shoot the initial video. *On Method* was originally envisioned as an 8- to 10-week project: we anticipated that it would take 6 to 10 days to develop scripts in an intense in-person retreat including Markham, Luka, and Rettmer. This initial phase would be followed immediately by an equally brief but intense ten-day in-person shoot with a small production team in Scandinavia. Finally, approximately fifteen days spread over another month would be required for a tightly managed postproduction process primarily involving Rettmer, followed by animation by Merckx.

The overall process took longer than we expected. And because of pandemic-related travel restrictions, most of the work was done online, often in sessions where one or two of the key team members were not “doing” anything, but were there to observe and provide on-the-spot feedback or observations, not least as microcosms of a particular type of audience. The 16-hour time-zone differences, combined with the process of merging modes of scholarly inquiry with documentary and creative video-production approaches to content presentation, meant that it was important for each of us to listen to what the others were seeing and hearing in the material as it developed, and then to develop complementary elements to deepen the translation of the content. This spirit of internal testing was particularly useful in the transition from script development to filming. A typical scenario would include Merckx (animator) working in the background and Rettmer (director, producer) listening in on Zoom while Markham (scholar, host) and Luka (scholar, producer) actively worked out—through conversing and writing—which scholarly elements (theories, concepts, methods) were the most important and debated how these elements could be conveyed in a video format. Listening to this exchange, Rettmer was better prepared to recognize key terms or concepts that would need to be emphasized later through lighting or performance during the shoot. Also, in postproduction, they were better positioned to know what to emphasize while providing notes on rough cuts and animation and to advise Merckx and Luka on how to proceed. Rettmer also contributed to Markham’s growing ability to recognize the “televisuality” of her speaking patterns on screen and they provided editing notes that cohered with the shared scholarly and audience objectives of the project.

Being separated physically and operating in distant time zones, everyone on the team had to adapt to the strangeness of the situation. Each person ended up adjusting their typical way of working, and occasionally performed tasks and roles that would normally have been covered by someone else. The long-distance shooting process was particularly intriguing. Shoots took place during the day in Australian time so that natural lighting could be used and so that the host and videographer could be at their best. The director attended by Zoom in the middle of their night. The laptop or phone was placed near the camera to provide a visual feed that was close to what one of the cameras was recording. Wardrobe was decided upon in advance, as were the specific locations in the home offices being used, and the host took care of her own makeup and hair, checking in with the director and videographer for continuity—or any differences between what they saw on screen and on camera. While a formal production schedule was not drawn up, there was a list of scenes developed for each shoot, including B-roll and the script of the day. In consultation with the director over Zoom, the videographer prepared at least two setups for each script, with two cameras for two different

angles. Of course, COVID-19 regulations meant that the videographer always wore a mask, and the host and videographer tried to remain two metres apart.

An additional example of how iteration aligned well with the traditions of working on a successful film set, even at a distance, was when the director recognized that the host's on-camera approach needed to shift, stopped the filming, and expressed this sentiment. The host then effected the change, the director provided feedback on that adjustment, and filming continued. In this way, the process was not just iterative but generative. Rettmer has described Markham's on-the-spot self-editing during shoots as an example of this process. Markham would take a script that had been developed through several phases of recording and rewriting (as detailed earlier in the article), and would rewrite it further after the initial on-camera read. A laptop was used as a teleprompter during the shoots, which meant that the script could be edited on the spot. Alternately, Markham would perform off script and Rettmer would immediately tweak the script, since it was in a live, shared-document format. Thus, over several takes, the narration would grow more refined. It was not the most efficient of approaches, but it was extremely enriching for the content. Most often, Rettmer would keep the final take (i.e., the third or fourth one), because by then Markham would have sharpened and polished certain segments on the fly while the camera was rolling.

When we apply the concept of iteration to multiple takes in a film shoot, we can shift away from the idea that repetition is about getting it right, as if there is a predetermined correct way of presenting the material. Instead, iteration becomes a feedback loop incorporating "glitches," that is, the smartly emergent errors that reveal a better way to build a performer's ability to accept and use feedback from a team. This iterative process enables a continuous sharpening of the performer's way of presenting ideas. This rehearsal process can refine the style of address, build nuance into the content, and generate stronger connections to particular audiences, all of which are critical to an effective product, but which, when we think about writing as the endgame in research, can be somewhat taken for granted.

Each evening immediately after the shoots, the videographer prepared the recorded footage for sending to the director/video editor in the United States. So, while the shoot involved "only" two people in person, the host and the videographer, it actually incorporated feedback from all the team members as if they came from different kinds of audiences. The director participated through videoconferencing and the two other team members weighed in with observations and notes on the dailies and rough cuts.

This small example is one of many we experienced where typical boundaries of expertise were blurred and transgressed because of necessity. The evolving situation of the pandemic created an intensely social situation of knowledge sharing, reliant not just on being generous but on accepting others' generosity. Continued goodwill seemed to flourish because everyone on the team was experiencing individual benefits and the whole was becoming obviously more than the sum of its parts, which is at the core of successful communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).



The final principle comes from media production studies. It involves developing a nuanced approach to considerations of potential audiences and the proven strategy of employing a charismatic and approachable host on screen to make the process easier and also to enhance the appeal of the final product.

#### FOURTH PRINCIPLE: COMMUNICATE CONTENT CHARISMATICALLY FOR NARROWCAST AUDIENCES

*Narrowcasting is the practice of first understanding that audiences can be categorized into groups with specific characteristics and desires (or, as in the case of fans, that audiences can group themselves), and then directing specific content toward these groups. In this project, the imagined target audiences shifted to include people outside scholarly spheres as a way of activating the commitment to critical pedagogy. On Method demonstrates how narrowcasting needs to be refined and realigned as a natural part of multidisciplinary and iterative processes.*

Luka uses the idea of “narrowcast audiences” in her work (e.g., Luka, 2022) to highlight the way in which niche groups of interested viewers or users of specific content can not only be identified as separate entities but also aggregated together despite different disciplinary interests and levels of engagement. This idea builds on Peter Bazalgette’s (2009) account of both public service broadcasting and publicly-funded arts councils in the United Kingdom, where he notes that narrowcast audiences must be targeted so that different parts of the cultural sector can successfully present a range of content and meaning to many audiences. This practice, which has been both exacerbated and more finely sliced in the internet era, is a longstanding one in media production environments (Luka, 2022), where imagining specific audiences that might be interested in content is a place to start rather than a place to end up.

In the *On Method* context, the principle of narrowcasting leads to thinking about a variety of specific audiences rather than one broad audience. This principle will help guide the marketing and distribution of the series, which could include posting the videos on classroom or library websites, on social media or video-streaming sites, or on public service broadcasting channels or MOOCs. Also, in envisioning the episodes as chapters for a book or as topics for a syllabus, we initially thought that *On Method* would be most appropriate for graduate students at various levels, most likely in communication studies, media studies or cultural studies, as well as for students using digital ethnographic or mixed qualitative methods to conduct their research. However, as we began shaping the content, we realized that to speak across disciplines and activate a self-guided experience for the viewer, we would be well-served to model both our design and content on the MasterClass format. Here, we were thinking about how the term “master class” is broadly employed in Western art history (and academe) as a way of signaling the sharing of expertise by a master. We also looked at the trademarked for-profit series of online offerings at <https://www.masterclass.com/> to think about how its format might be useful. As we developed the structure of the videos, we were already striving to strike a balance between plain language and complex ideas. When Rettmer and Merckx began to apply the unfamiliar-to-them MasterClass concepts to their own work during preproduction, it became clear that the *On Method* videos might also attract researchers in several non-academic fields, including citizen scientists, activists,

and people supervising research who did not necessarily have expertise of their own. The possibility of reaching a wider viewership was immediately appealing to all of us.

With the idea of expanding the audience, but without a specific target yet, we continued to consider questions about audience. If the videos were circulating in environments where non-academics were more likely to find them, how could we contextualize the videos adequately for these narrowcast groups? Would we offer consultative sessions to target lay viewers' use of the videos for their purposes? Would we supply annotated bibliographical materials or short abstracts? Would we provide a synopsis of the exercises that Markham and others had developed over the previous decades so that instructors could engage with their students in activities inspired by the videos? Would we set up a series of modules or syllabi to demonstrate how the series could be used? Moreover, could we sell subscriptions or otherwise limit access to restrict circulation?

This audience analysis was useful in helping build toward reaching a narrowcast audience, but it was complicated by the fact that the content (methods of inquiry) was not composed of standalone topics. We realized that it was quite possible that any given viewer would be unfamiliar with the way knowledge circulates in the academic sphere (citations, conferences, keynotes), and would not have a comprehensive background in critical and ethnographic methods, or even in qualitative methods. In that case, we wondered, would it be necessary for viewers to learn something about academe? Or about Markham's approach? Or was it enough for them to know that Markham was a well-known expert in the field? This line of questioning affected the contents, which is perhaps not surprising given that it occurred in parallel with iterative design.

One example of how these questions shaped a particular episode can be found in the idea of "constant comparison" in qualitative research methods, particularly in grounded theory. Markham made this idea concrete in Episode 9 when she alluded to her collection of rocks from beaches around the world. The idea of rock collecting provides an easy entry into the topic for people from many walks of life—after all, who has not taken rocks from a beach or at least thought of doing so? The onscreen presentation used many visuals while it layered ideas to complicate the "constant comparison" sufficiently to be meaningful for researchers with prior experience in this type of analysis, while remaining accessible to lay viewers who might not have articulated their thoughts in academic language but who would have readily recognized how things can go together in a multitude of ways. A sampling of the narrowcast audiences that might be interested in this episode as well as the others could include, among others, English-speaking visual arts curators, environmental activists, creative entrepreneurs, fourth-year undergraduate digital-technology students, and regional public-media producers.

Towards the end of the project, when we analyzed what had worked and had not worked during the production process, we realized the importance of the main presenter. In the case of written work, this element of scholarly communication is often overlooked. Indeed, in an article, when the author's style or charisma is present, value is added, but when it is absent, it is not particularly missed, since the reader is paying more attention to the content than to the style or format. For successful knowledge dissemination on media platforms such as the internet, radio or TV, however, a host who

is charismatic and enthusiastic will enhance the message; indeed, such qualities are practically a prerequisite for effective communication. In this case, having an adaptive and knowledgeable host also made the overall process much easier.

Markham, both the content expert and the host, brought significant experience not just from presenting research in classrooms and auditoriums, often using visuals to enhance her delivery, but also from training people in public speaking and debate. Rettmer, a film director, noticed Markham's seemingly natural charismatic presence on camera, which Luka, a digital media producer and director, suggested extended not only from Markham's confidence developed over her many years of research and presentations, but also from her practice of rhetorical skills. As the project progressed, however, the team recognized that confidence or comfort on camera were not sufficient to make a host appear charismatic. In fact, this charisma was the outcome of previous training and experience combined with ongoing team interactions and attention to micro-moments of iterative development. This observation brings us to a final consideration related to audiences.

As we began to think more about the relationship between audience and host and as we developed and produced the nine episodes around the latter's expertise, we spent time analyzing the ways in which *On Method* was or was not a feminist project. It was evident that the content was focused on compelling issues and challenges suitable to many fields of inquiry, and that the collaborative, iterative and generative approach we used embodied a commitment to critical pedagogy. It was also clear that asserting and showcasing the expertise of Markham and the rest of the team members would contribute to equity in the visibility and representation of women as academics and as media hosts. As context, we are all too familiar with the ways in which very few media productions in commercial and public broadcasting are co-led or co-constructed by women, never mind women-led (Luka, 2022). Similarly, in academic contexts, there is still a remarkable dearth of women in leadership positions, including in projects where becoming a media personality can be supported. Here again, an analogy helped: we ended up describing our team as a group of divas demonstrating collective confidence in our considerable bodies of experience rather than profiling a single member's ego or auteuristic voice. The use of the feminized term "diva" in this analogy is deliberate, as it indicates an alignment with feminist intersectional research and activism (e.g., Harvey, 2020). Working in the liminal space created by a global pandemic to attain a scholarly objective and using the opportunities offered by collaborative approaches within the academy as well as by media production processes helped us feel less constrained by the everyday barriers that we are all too familiar with in our own practices and careers.

#### EXAMPLE OF "ETHICS AS METHOD"

The nuances involved in shifting from simply reading a scholarly article or recounting research findings in scholarly spaces to producing audience-friendly content for a mix of narrowcast academic, media, and social-media audiences are significant. As we discuss in the principles above, it takes time and several working sessions to redevelop written talks, published papers, and lesson plans into short scripts that can satisfy both academic and popular viewers. At the same time, our collective experience as artists

and media producers means that we knew the importance of resisting the oversimplification of a message to attract a non-academic audience.

This tension was made abundantly clear in a final example we offer in this article. Episode 5 (“Ethics as Method”) had a number of false starts concerning the concept and practices of ethics in research. While we did end up with an episode that focused on the central idea of examining the power dynamics implicated in everyday research, we also discarded two or three other completed versions. The idea of ethics as method is at the heart of Markham’s expertise, and we originally thought that “Ethics as Method” might be the opening episode. However, we eventually decided to place this episode right in the middle of the sequence of 9 episodes, since we needed time to set up this complex idea as central to Markham’s approach to research. By then, a viewer would have realized that ethics as method was the foundation for the entire series, revealing the basic values underpinning Markham’s approach. We threaded reinforcing examples throughout other episodes (including “3: Citizen Science,” “4: Sherlock Holmes: Thick Description,” “7: Situational Mapping,” and “8: Reflexive Field Notes”). One of the principles used to guide these decisions—from script development to post-production—was that people are experts in their own lives and will respond positively to approaches that are relevant to them and that are neither opaque nor heavy with jargon. It is worth noting that this viewpoint came from the members of the media production team as well as from the examples of long-term observational research practices of internet scholars (such as Fiesler and Rettberg) discussed earlier. It is not typically a guiding principle for scholarly research communication.

## **Conclusion**

To move towards a conclusion, we examine the value of transgressing boundaries, be they of discipline, institution, or professional expertise, to build communities of practice that strengthen the scholarly dissemination of knowledge beyond the limits of typical academic products. Once we realized, individually and as a group, that the result could be so much more than what we had originally planned, we pushed ourselves to the next level, to integrate a sense of freedom into the process and result. Of course, this initiative was aided by the fact that we brought to the table our own commitments to resist totalizing approaches to the analysis of social interactions through creative and scholarly work, including what has come to be known as the replicable scientific method. Still, we found ourselves crossing new boundaries into the territory of rethinking the purpose of scholarship and disrupting previous ideas about audience, hosting, scripting, and teaching. This rethinking and disruption included the development of a scholarly collaborative node embedded in a small-unit, multiple-hats production structure inspired by arts-documentary and low-budget filmmaking processes. The result was credible and pithy content with high production values.

The project was also a feminist and intersectional experiment that refused to dumb down the content. *On Method* features the expertise and voice of a feminist scholar working with intersectional commitments as the series host. This host sought to get to the heart of each complex methodological approach while remaining accessible and entertaining to several potential narrowcast audiences, an imperative long studied in media production. The innovative nature of this project arose from these objectives,

combined with the short timelines and the complexities of producing media across international borders during a global pandemic. We built a flexible, multiskilled team to transform both scholarly and media production procedures for knowledge translation. At different points during production, we compared the *On Method* team to a collection of talented and individually experienced musicians in a band working as one to produce something distinct and cohesive. The specific contributions of each member added up to more than a mere collision of individual talents. A “community of practice” is often described as the process and product of the voluntary commitment of individuals who unite around a passion rather than within a predetermined structure like the divisions in a workplace or physically co-located members of a neighborhood (Wenger, 1998). *On Method* certainly exemplifies this situation, and highlights the element of being willing to transcend boundaries, give and receive generously, and wear different hats with skill and enthusiasm.

The knowledge translation model that inspired the *On Method* project will not function for everyone. However, it has the potential to work for a team that includes confident and adaptive scholars alongside creative and generous arts and media producers willing to put in the time for a genuinely collaborative and iterative experience, including the commitment to develop and experiment with different ways of articulating scholarly messages.

This project is devoted to advancing the practice of creative and effective knowledge dissemination that operates beyond writing up findings or producing dense academic texts. Increasingly, sociocultural and economic analyses recognize the ongoing dominance of social media, the internet, and other platforms in our everyday lives. Under these conditions, a core goal of critical pedagogy to build critical thinking in the public sphere becomes more and more relevant. This practice occurs already, mostly through such platforms as YouTube or TikTok, not only as lay people teach to and learn from each other, but also as more and more scholars use these resources to produce meaningful content. Our approach is different, in that we produced in a MasterClass style, which required a complex level of media production. Reaching our goal was no mean feat. Producing what we did required time, expertise, and resources. In an educational context, such a process would require a commitment to fund production environments, whether professional media producers are involved or not. Also, it requires scholars to shift their practice toward the role of media host, presenter, and producer/director, rather than writer. Moreover, even with the best combination of teams and resources, it is likely that this kind of media production will not work for every (or for every kind of) academic expertise. In this, academe is no different from the media industry or the culture sector or various arts ecologies. Even so, there is a significant opportunity to blur boundaries—indeed, to actively transcend them—in the interests of sharing knowledge that can be of as much use in everyday life as it is in more rarefied research.

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## Notes

1. Sample video episodes: “Introduction to On Method” (<https://vimeo.com/688236296/9977cb2c9a>) and “Sherlock Holmes: Thick Description” (<https://vimeo.com/732275271/b7bbc250b8>)
2. This article was initially developed through a series of conversations held between the four primary team members. Although the two lead authors drafted the article, the seeds for many of the ideas presented herein are the product of our work as a team.
3. MasterClass first aired in 2015 (<https://medium.com/brand-origins/how-did-masterclass-start-a5cfd7644d9>).

## Website

MasterClass, <https://www.masterclass.com>

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