9-16-2019

Preparing Researchers to Conduct Interdisciplinary, Multi-method Qualitative Research

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Abstract

In this paper I outline ideas for how qualitative research methods might be taught in ways that value difference, promote dialogue, and encourage graduates to engage actively in their disciplines to promote the benefits of qualitative inquiry, locally, nationally and globally. I argue for approaches to teach qualitative inquiry in ways that value (1) interdisciplinarity, in that teaching draws on multiple epistemologies and theoretical approaches to inquiry developed across disciplines; (2) diversity in methodological approaches, in that teaching explores multiple methods to respond to research questions that are continually subject to revision, innovation, and critical analysis; and (3) the knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom. The purpose of such an approach to teaching qualitative research is to facilitate spaces where students can grow into capable researchers who are multilingual in theory and methods and communicate across multi-faceted bodily and spatial difference. This is not easy work, and I present several issues we might consider in the teaching of qualitative inquiry. These include recognizing the emotional component in learning qualitative inquiry, experimenting with boundary crossing, moving from prescriptions to ambiguity, designing rigorous qualitative inquiry, dealing with change, and learning to speak to multiple audiences.

Keywords

Teaching Qualitative Research, Learning Qualitative Research, Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies, Emotions, Boundary-Crossing, Representing Qualitative Inquiry

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Acknowledgements

Preparing Researchers to Conduct Interdisciplinary, Multi-Method Qualitative Research

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In this paper I outline ideas for how qualitative research methods might be taught in ways that value difference, promote dialogue, and encourage graduates to engage actively in their disciplines to promote the benefits of qualitative inquiry, locally, nationally and globally. I argue for approaches to teach qualitative inquiry in ways that value (1) interdisciplinarity, in that teaching draws on multiple epistemologies and theoretical approaches to inquiry developed across disciplines; (2) diversity in methodological approaches, in that teaching explores multiple methods to respond to research questions that are continually subject to revision, innovation, and critical analysis; and (3) the knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom. The purpose of such an approach to teaching qualitative research is to facilitate spaces where students can grow into capable researchers who are multilingual in theory and methods and communicate across multi-faceted bodily and spatial difference. This is not easy work, and I present several issues we might consider in the teaching of qualitative inquiry. These include recognizing the emotional component in learning qualitative inquiry, experimenting with boundary crossing, moving from prescriptions to ambiguity, designing rigorous qualitative inquiry, dealing with change, and learning to speak to multiple audiences. Keywords: Teaching Qualitative Research, Learning Qualitative Research, Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies, Emotions, Boundary-Crossing, Representing Qualitative Inquiry

Introduction

Fifteen years ago, narrative researchers Ruthellen Josselson, Amia Lieblich, and Dan McAdams wrote in the introduction to their book on teaching and learning narrative research that: "There are many books that purport to detail how to do qualitative research, but none that tell you how to teach it" (2003, p. 4). In fact, such is not the case now, since we do have access to books on how to teach qualitative research (Janesick, 2016; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018), their own included. There is also a wealth of new writing that discusses a variety of approaches to teaching qualitative inquiry across disciplines and from a variety of theoretical approaches.

In over 40 articles and chapters cited here[1], authors have described approaches to convey specific topics involved in teaching qualitative inquiry to students, including ethnography and autoethnography (Alexander, 2013; Keen, 1996; Leblanc, 1998; Schmid, 1992; Spry, 2016; Tjora, 2006; Trujillo, 1999), interviewing (Hsiung, 2016a; Roulston, 2012; Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003), qualitative data analysis (Mallette & Saldaña, Forthcoming; Waite, 2011), qualitative data analysis software (Blank, 2004; Macgowan & Beaulaurier, 2005), reflexivity (Hsiung, 2008), and validity (Cosgrove, 2018). Authors have

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[1] See also special issues of *International Review of Qualitative Research*, Vol. 11 (3) and (4); and *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol 22 (2)

discussed pedagogical approaches to teaching qualitative inquiry, including as transgressive practice (Hsiung, 2016b), approaches informed by contemplative practices (Bhattacharya, 2018) and new materialist theories (Guyotte & Kuntz, 2018; Kuby et al., 2016; Kuby & Christ, 2018; Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). More recently, scholars have discussed the teaching of qualitative research methods in online settings (Bender & Hill, 2016; Hunter, Ortloff, & Winkle-Wagner, 2014; Maggio, Chenail, & Todd, 2001; Miskovic & Lyutykh, 2017; Moore & Janzen, 2012; Ryen, 2009).

Literature encompasses accounts of both teachers' perspectives (Borochowitz, 2005; Hunter et al., 2014; Roulston, deMarrais, and Paulus, 2017; Stallings, 1995), and students' perspectives (deMarrais, Moret, & Pope, 2018; Roulston, Pope, Paulus, & deMarrais, 2018). Writing on teaching qualitative inquiry conveys some of the fears and emotional responses that students encounter in the learning process (Bartels & Wagenaar, 2018; Lesko, Simmons, Quarshie, & Newton, 2008). Scholars have also written about how teachers might intentionally mentor students through the challenges that they encounter in learning about qualitative research and methods (Hoskins & White, 2013; Noy, 2015). Through all this, what has not changed is the idea that talking about teaching qualitative research helps us to understand the nature of qualitative research itself.

For instance, in their discussion of narrative research, Josselson, and her colleagues (2003) forward the idea that

> It is inherently an inductive process that involves shaping the instrument of research, the researcher, as a medium for the discovery and interpretation of meanings. In talking about how to teach narrative research, we find that we end up discussing the essential principles of what constitutes the work itself. (p. 4)

Other scholars have also forwarded the idea that learning and teaching qualitative inquiry resembles the *doing* of qualitative research. For example, Preissle and deMarrais (2011, 2015) have discussed qualitative pedagogy as encompassing five ways of being that enact how qualitative research is conducted. These are being responsive, recursive, reflexive, reflective, and contextual.

Rather than talk about how to teach qualitative inquiry or discuss pedagogical approaches, in this paper I begin by commenting on the contexts in which qualitative research is taught, the need for talking to scholars across disciplinary boundaries, and the values that I aspire to in teaching. I then introduce six issues that I've encountered in teaching qualitative research that I invite readers to reflect on. I offer reflective questions for us to think about as we pass the baton to our own students, who will themselves be assisting in the work of preparing new scholars to conduct qualitative research that is thoughtful, ethical, rigorous, and that may be used for the benefit of human kind and the planet.

The context in which we teach qualitative research

Over the past two decades assaults on the legitimacy and value of qualitative methods for the conduct of research have continued. For example, randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs are still deemed to be the gold standard for generating evidence to inform policy making in the field of education (e.g., The What Works Clearinghouse, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/). Although some fields have made significant inroads into establishing the legitimacy of qualitative methods for understanding the social world, in others,

there is still much work to be done. For example, in an interview about learning qualitative inquiry with a doctoral student from the field of forestry, he had the following to say:[2]

> Jason: …there's a lot more that goes into [qualitative research] than I ever realized.
>
> IR: Can you talk a little bit about what, what some of the more was?
>
> Jason: So…the way I looked at qualitative research before, and I'll be frank. And .…part of this is because in our department people think it's a complete joke. They really do. And I was embarrassed to do it…we had a couple [of] seminar speakers come in who just got ridiculed in front of the whole audience in terms of their approach and it wasn't scientific and it's just kind of a feel good story and you put what you want in there. So … that was my experience with qualitative. And …it's hard to overcome the background that you're given a lot of the time. So I went into the [qualitative] class and I was extremely skeptical and almost cynical, but just going through the motions. Experiencing the reading, the different reports and understanding that just because you're presenting an excerpt from an interview, doesn't just mean you haphazardly selected it and stuck it in there to support your argument.

Jason continued, by discussing the transition he had experienced from conducting research in the natural sciences to working in the social sciences, in which he had moved from understanding science in terms of statistical tests and absolute values to encompassing the ambiguity of social life.

> Jason: And what's really helped me with that transition is not so much a transition from quantitative to qualitative but a transition from hard core natural science to social science. And you're taught in chemistry and biology and all those courses that it either is or isn't. You know, this species will or will not survive once it hits the genetic bottleneck. You know, it's, this habitat is too small, this habitat is just the right size. And there are all these absolute values in there. Social science, as you know, is not like that at all. And people are so complex. It's, it's really difficult to, to come up with any absolute answers to anything.

In this example, we see that Jason has made a transition from being "skeptical" and "embarrassed" to engage in qualitative research, to a position in which he has become comfortable with viewing the world through a constructionist, rather than a positivist lens. Some, but not all of our students enter our classes with similar sorts of experiences and perceptions of qualitative inquiry. Others join us with much more positive prior experiences.

Take for example, Drew, who came to a doctoral program in public health from a background in anthropology. He comments on how his training in anthropology had not distinguished between quantitative and qualitative methods:

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[2] In this paper I draw on data from IRB-approved studies in which I have been involved. This excerpt is drawn from a study that examined students' experiences in learning about qualitative research methods over the course of their program of study (see also Roulston, Preissle, & Freeman, 2013).

I don't see myself specializing in one or the other — quantitative or qualitative methods. So that's a very big distinction between public health, and what I think anthropology helped me out with in coming into public health. I didn't have to learn the benefits of rich data, of rich qualitative data, it was all just, that was very apparent. I just couldn't see making a distinction between the two as heavily as the public health program wanted to.

It's clear that we need to think about how we might assist students to learn to talk to one another across disciplinary boundaries.

Talking across disciplinary boundaries

Over several years I've worked with scholars from multiple departments across the university, including forestry, art, dance, philosophy, and psychology on a proposal for a training grant that would bring graduate students in the arts and humanities together with students in STEM fields to build core creative competencies and skills in interdisciplinary collaboration. This group has done preliminary work to try out the ideas for which funding is currently in the process of being awarded. We've observed that students in the natural sciences, arts and humanities were eager to be involved and actively engaged in working with others across disciplinary boundaries to complete collaborative tasks.

As we have gathered around the table to discuss ideas, we've each had to recognize that in some senses, we are speaking different languages. We have to ask one another what we mean and how we understand terms. We have had to allow one another to express ignorance without fear and work together to help one another understand how research is understood and conducted across disciplinary boundaries. One of the ideas brought forward in this work is the idea of "wicked problems," a term coined by Horst Rittel (1930-1990), a design theorist, to describe ill-structured problems of planning that cannot be solved by linear thinking and have no definitive solutions. Our world faces huge challenges, and with each new discovery and innovation, we learn of unintended consequences. Qualitative approaches to research are well-suited to examining these kinds of problems, and to generate in-depth understanding of human experience within complex and fluid contexts. We need to work with our students so they might forge new pathways and to be innovative as researchers, and to engage in work that will have lasting value and impact in engaging with real world problems. As teachers of qualitative methods, what do we want for new scholars? In the next section, to prompt readers' thinking, I offer the values that I hope to instill in my students as they complete their programs and pursue their own scholarly interests in communities all over the world.

The values of qualitative research

The field of qualitative research is, in my view, at its best when it values:

(1) Interdisciplinarity, in that it draws on multiple epistemologies and theoretical approaches to inquiry developed across disciplines (CohenMiller & Pate, 2019);
(2) Diversity in methodological approaches, in that it uses multiple methods to examine research questions and recognizes how these are embedded in different historical trajectories. These multiple methods are continually subject to revision, innovation, and critical analysis (For example, compare the 1st and 5th editions of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* edited by Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018); and

(3) Knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom. Instructors and students work together to collaboratively facilitate spaces in which all can grow into capable researchers who are multilingual in theory and methods, and communicate across difference locally, nationally and globally.

To prepare our students to conduct qualitative research in a world that is uncertain, to face wicked problems, we need to model for and prepare our students to see the value of interdisciplinary work, to explore multiple methods, and to value one another as peers in spite of disagreement. Yet in my experience, and in research on teaching, I've observed a number of issues that students and their teachers face as they develop deeper understanding of qualitative inquiry. By thinking further about these, teaching faculty can recognize some of the hurdles that students face, and provide necessary support and reassurance.

Issues include

(1) recognizing students' emotional responses to engaging in and learning about qualitative approaches to research;
(2) taking risks in crossing boundaries into new "provinces of meaning" (Schutz & Luckmann, 1989);
(3) moving from a reliance on prescriptions to becoming comfortable with ambiguity;
(4) learning how to assess quality in the design and conduct of qualitative studies;
(5) engaging with innovation and change within the wider field of inquiry; and
(6) learning how to speak to multiple audiences in ways that have not always been valued in the academy.

Below I explore these issues in more detail.

1. Recognizing the emotional component in learning qualitative inquiry

Scholarship on teaching and learning qualitative inquiry has shown that many of our students experience profound emotional responses in learning about qualitative research methods (Bartels & Wagenaar, 2018; deMarrais et al., 2018; Lesko et al., 2008). As the academy becomes more diversified, we bring students together who come from different ethnicities, races, nationalities, social classes, gender identification, and able-bodiedness, among other subject positions. As our students come together to begin or continue their journey in qualitative inquiry, in addition to learning to understand their peers' perspectives, it is not uncommon for them to be plagued with feelings that they don't know enough.

For example, one student humorously commented:

My questions are embarrassing actually — and I have more too but I need to preserve my ego by not asking too many that make me sound ill equipped to be in this class! :) (Tiffany, Course on Case Study Research)[3]

When undertaking coursework, students can feel overwhelmed with worry about getting things "right," as they come to learn that the research process typically takes longer than anticipated.

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[3] In addition to the earlier studies cited, excerpts are drawn from a study that examined students' experiences in learning about qualitative research in online contexts (see also Roulston et al., 2013).

> Honestly, I feel completely overwhelmed and worried that I will never be able to finish coding and analyzing my current data, not to mention conducting, transcribing, and analyzing the two additional interviews that will be required for this project. (Rowena, Course on Qualitative Research Design)

In response to reassurance from her professor, Rowena wrote:

> Thanks, Dr. __. I'll admit to being a little frustrated with the time consuming nature of the work when I posted last Sunday, but I've since had time to realize just how valuable the process has been. I hope you're right — and I'm sure you will be — about the first transcript being the hardest to analyze.

Yet, students also experience positive emotional responses to the process of learning qualitative inquiry:

> OK…nerdy moment—I got really excited when I began analyzing the documents in light of [Lindsay] Prior's methods. Items that I would normally glaze over without a second thought were seen in a completely new light! (Emily, Course on Qualitative Research Design)

And with time, when faced with new tasks that are initially challenging, students rise to the occasion. For example, one doctoral student reported:

> Well….I actually thought it [Course on Hermeneutics] was going to be a different kind of class. ((Laughing)) And when I got into it and found that it was 99% philosophy, I about wet myself because it's, I'm a scientist and it's like learning Swahili, you know? So, but I, I wanted to see what it was about and I, I don't quit things easily and so I thought, I can do this. All I need is a B, I can do this. So that's my goal, to finish it. (Joyce)

What we hope is that students will come to recognize that feeling overwhelmed and confused is part of learning any new skill. We can remind students that with more practice, they will enjoy the process, even if their head is spinning:

> This class is a treasure chest full of options. The exposure is phenomenal and for those who ever doubted the power and depth of qualitative research, they need to join us! However, is your head spinning? (Laura, Course on Qualitative Data Analysis)

Bartels and Wagenaar (2018, p. 203) comment that in teaching and learning qualitative research, students must work through the "embodied experiences of doubt, discontent and unsettledness to foster feelings of animation, excitement and creativeness."

Before reading on, take a moment now to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing that you have noticed about students' emotional responses in learning about qualitative research methods. If you are a student, write down one thing that you want your instructors to know about the emotions that you have experienced in learning about qualitative research methods.

Below, and throughout the paper, I include responses from Kate Guthrie, a doctoral student approaching the completion of her degree, and Anna CohenMiller, a faculty member who teaches qualitative research methods to illustrate others' reflections on each issue.

> Kate: **Sometimes I've felt frozen in the complexity of it all** – especially analysis. Undertaking qualitative research was not my usual rhythm of problem solving – BUT – that is what intrigued me. It taught me patience, depth, curiosity, being comfortable with ambiguity.
>
> Anna: When students are ready to embrace the "flow" of qualitative research, in particular letting go of the-right-or-wrong answer mentality, strong emotions often follow. I have had multiple students begin their research projects with a purely quantitative focus only to learn through the process that the question they really want to answer, to understand, to engage with, are narrative and qualitative in nature. While qualitative courses can bring students to this realization, it tends to happen most within thesis and dissertation supervision and seminars, where students are deeply engaging and struggling to find their voice in research, which is what qualitative research has allowed. In this way, I become a sounding board and emotional support.

2. Experimenting with boundary crossing

As the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) discussed, how we as individuals experience reality is what we assume to be

> the natural one and we are not ready to abandon our attitudes toward it without having experienced a specific shock which induces us to break through the limits of this "finite province of meaning" and to put its reality in question. (Schutz, 1996, p. 37)

Schutz and Luckmann (1989) wrote about various forms of boundary crossing, through which we can come to understand others' points of view. Elsewhere (Roulston, 2018), I've used Schutz and Luckmann's idea of small, medium and great transcendencies to think through what it might look like in learning and teaching qualitative inquiry to experiment with boundary crossings. For students from disciplines in which qualitative inquiry is not valued, learning about qualitative research is a *new* province of meaning.

For example, last semester, several students in my class expressed the challenges they faced in making sense of a host of new concepts. One commented:

> My biggest struggle overall is just the content itself, honestly. I think that coming from a strictly quantitative background has made it difficult for me to understand and appreciate qualitative methods. They have felt abstract for me at times, but I think I'm getting it. (Anonymous student comments in Introductory Qualitative Research Class).

For some students, crossing boundaries may involve a process of rethinking what research is. Bartels and Wagenaar (2018, p. 193) assert that "There is a widespread tendency to favor a formulaic, textbook conception of QR [qualitative research], in which method application, neutrality and control are the privileged approach to truth, certainty and scientific authority." This sort of approach to qualitative inquiry uncritically applies a positivist perspective to examining the world that oversimplifies how science works and what researchers actually do.

For example, a graduate from a doctoral program in learning design and technology, Eric, reported how his prior understanding of what research is had changed over the course of his doctoral studies:

> Wow, that was really kind of amazing how much my perspective about research has changed since then….when I think back to my undergrad days, and going into that, I think I saw some of my professors, researchers as sort of people on a pedestal. They kind of knew all the right things to do, they never messed up….they always knew what the right answer was. But… going through the process, I found that that was a lot different. So I would think, when I first started there, I had this perspective of this is a procedure that I'm gonna do, and it always works, and I just need to learn this procedure, and everything will be great. But I soon found out that that wasn't the case.

In this excerpt, it is evident that crossing disciplinary and methodological boundaries for some students also involves moving away from prescriptions and getting comfortable with ambiguity. But before I discuss that, take a moment to reflect.

Take a moment to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing that you have noticed about the boundary crossings that you yourself have experienced, and that you have noticed among your students. If you are a student, write down one thing that you want your instructors to know about the boundaries that you have come across as you learn about qualitative research.

> Kate: **Learning a new language**. I feel as though I've grown into an inquiry line of thinking with myself; I needed the push to extend this to inquiry into the lives of others. I am not one who was used to "prying." But I started to relate inquiry with my own experiences going to counseling/therapy as a young adult.
> Anna: In Central Asia (where I work), the hard sciences are often associated with male thought and privilege. Therefore, I've observed a tendency for male students to focus on quantitative research in an effort to push, to prove, to show, and to evidence their "good work." A profound change often occurs over the course as the students become open to incorporating qualitative methods, even arts-based approaches, to facilitate understanding their topic and give voice to their participants[4].

3. Moving from prescriptions to ambiguity

A crucial step in the process of learning to conduct qualitative research is coming to the realization that the all-knowing researcher who never errs is a myth and recipes are not going to be that useful to conduct good quality, innovative research. As one doctoral researcher put it:

> I think I've always come from this perspective like you know, math is this clean cut … one right answer subject, and English and your social sciences are more, they're more fuzzy and they're more grey and I'm definitely more of an English person, but I also feel like, "Oh I need to be understanding things in this mathematical or scientific way." And I kind of view the quant/qual thing like that. Like everything seemed really clean cut but I've realized that it wasn't always. But I thought, well maybe that's just because I don't understand it. But I feel OK, now, you know it's not that clean cut. (Belinda)

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[4] For further discussion, see (CohenMiller, 2018).

With time, students gain more experience in sitting with ambiguity, and recognize that resorting to check lists is no longer plausible (if it ever was!).

> We've actually read a couple of articles about [quality]. And in fact, in [the introductory qualitative methods course] we read the one that the QUAL faculty did about quality[5]. And that helped, but it was still (pause) I found it still a little bit vague… part of me wants just a check list right. And that's probably not possible, but… (Greg)

We can encourage students not to take at face value the meaning of concepts found in the literature — but rather to interrogate, question, and explore these. We can strive to facilitate spaces in which students can "play seriously" with different approaches to research, all the while reflecting on how they learn.[6] This means as teachers of qualitative research we must also get used to not having all the answers and responding to uncomfortable questions. We can take the role of co-learner alongside our students, since the field itself is constantly changing. Debates within the field of qualitative research are dynamic. We can go beyond the introductory literature and text-book definitions that take for granted the meaning of terms such as triangulation, bias, subjectivity, reflexivity, constructionism, validity, data, or evidence. All of these terms are debated and have complicated histories which can be examined further. As one student summed it up:

> Two of the readings from this week start with a warning related to the scope of information presented to new qualitative researchers. Prasad states "the resulting confusion… is not surprising" (Prasad, 2005, p. 1) and Crotty writes "Fledgling researchers often express bewilderment at the array of methodologies and methods laid out before their gaze" (Crotty, 1998, p. 1). The volume of terms, the fact that many are similar, and some are used differently by different authors makes sorting it out a formidable task, especially for one who works and teaches in the hard sciences. (Paul, Course on Introductory qualitative methods)

As one practical example of how students move from following prescriptions to becoming comfortable with ambiguity, take the task of developing an interview guide. Frequently, novice researchers develop numerous questions, in the hope that by asking a series of questions, they'll be able to gather all the information that they need. Yet, to conduct in-depth interviews with participants in which people feel comfortable to describe their experiences and life stories in detail, less is actually more (Noy, 2015). In Jennifer Mason's (2018) description of developing an interview guide, she encourages students to think about topics, rather than specific questions. For novices with no interviewing experience this task may initially be too challenging. Yet, with guided practice, students can move from rules of thumb to a more open and embodied experience of conducting interviews with strangers in which they feel comfortable to use an interview guide in flexible ways. For example, Hsiung (2016a) has developed an online portal in which teachers of qualitative inquiry can use archived interviews to help students recognize the features of skillful and less skillful interviews.

Gaining comfort with ambiguity is part of the process of conducting qualitative research. After all, if we already know what we hope to find, why do research at all? As Belinda noted,

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[5] Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre. (2007).
[6] My thanks to Ron Chenail for highlighting this point for me.

You see these examples in class, "Oh, yeah, that'll be easy." But it's not. And I think, like there's little ethical things, like calls you have to make on every level, and you can't just, like it's not spelled out for you. And so you do have to kind of go with your gut or your instinct some time. But, it's hard when you don't know if that's right or not. And the only thing that's kind of comforting, "Oh OK, it's supposed to be that way," not "Oh, I'm just not prepared, and I don't know enough and I'm doing this wrong." (Belinda)

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) outlined a five-step process of skill acquisition from novice to expert involving a

> progression *from* the analytic behavior of a detached subject, consciously decomposing his (sic) environment into recognizable elements, and following abstract rules, *to* involved skilled behavior based on an accumulation of concrete experiences and the unconscious recognition of new situations as similar to whole remembered ones. (p. 35, italics in original)

Clearly, this process takes time, and one will not become an expert in any field overnight. As the quotes from these doctoral students indicate, qualitative research is messy, and the way forward is not always clear. Even though students might yearn for a prescribed "never-fail" approach, or a check list of steps to follow, in practice, doing qualitative research is filled with moments in which the unexpected occurs, and ethical decisions concerning morally ambiguous issues must be made. Thus, we want students to become comfortable with ambiguity, to go beyond recipes, to be innovative, ethical and reflexive. Part of the work of teaching qualitative inquiry is to encourage students to let go of formulaic approaches to research design and methods in order to design and conduct inquiry that is compelling, and about which they are passionate. Bartels and Wagenaar (2018, p. 203) argue that to do this requires "practical judgment, sociability, imagination, being in touch with one's feelings, and a tolerance for critique and setbacks — in a word, it involves the whole person."

Take a moment now to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing that you have noticed about your own journey in moving from prescriptions to ambiguity. What have you noticed about your students? If you are a student, write down one thing that you want your instructors to know about the guidelines you have come to understand in learning how to conduct qualitative research.

> Kate: **Moving from prescriptive to ambiguity.** My own traditional way of learning doesn't value ambiguity. In educational research, the "whole person" (including students and teachers) can get lost throughout the research process in the pursuit of decision- or conclusion-oriented research findings. We are taught not to bring emotions or gut reactions or intentions to the "scientific process."
> Anna: I personally am very comfortable with ambiguity, and even thrive in it in many ways. When using methods such as multiple choice testing, this backfires as I can always see another option. This means that when I work with students, directing them to **a** "right" answer feels uncomfortable at best. Thus, I focus on creating a collaborative, safe space in which we can explore ideas together. In this way, each class period becomes an opportunity to process new ways of thinking, relax into the various modes, play with research, and ultimately become confident enough to be vulnerable in a communal supportive space. Sometimes this can be as simple as practicing reflective researcher notes that

can be voluntarily shared, or through more in-depth projects to engage directly with ambiguity.

4. Learning how to assess quality in the design and conduct of rigorous qualitative inquiry.

Over time, students come to a more thoughtful consideration of qualitative inquiry. For example, Jason, who was quoted at the outset of this paper, commented:

> I guess what I'm beginning to understand is that there's no right or wrong way to tackle a problem and .…you can look at any research methodology and criticize it for a number of reasons. No matter how sound it is you can always find…a problem with it. And I just feel more comfortable as a researcher knowing that, knowing there are different ways to look at the issues and knowing that there are lots of different options you have when it comes to data collection that can help you to answer certain questions. (Jason)

With the excitement of coming to understand that there is no limit to the ways in which studies can be designed, there is also a need for a certain amount of caution. That is, students need to be cognizant of how they situate their work within the larger field of inquiry, as well as the need for practicing ethical reflexivity and critical observation. With the abundance of approaches to qualitative work comes great responsibility — to be informed, well-read, and astute in providing rationales to support one's work. As Belinda commented:

> Like it helped me really see how there are a lot of different kinds of qualitative research and how there really does need to be a system and a purpose for why you do the things you do. And you might not do the same thing as someone else, but as long as you can back it up, like you have a good reason and you can back it up with your framework, and then other research that's been done, then it's open, and you do what is best for what you're trying to accomplish. (Belinda)

Now, more than ever, our students need to be critical consumers of research. You may have read about the Sokal Squared Hoax conducted in 2018 (Kafka, 2018). This has been named after the infamous Sokal affair in which a physics professor, Alan Sokal, submitted a faked article to a journal of postmodern cultural studies which he revealed was a hoax when it was published in 1996. In the same vein, three scholars wrote 20 faked papers on what they pejoratively call "grievance studies" to peer reviewed journals. Seven of these articles were published. The authors explained that

> The papers themselves span at least fifteen subdomains of thought in grievance studies, including (feminist) gender studies, masculinities studies, queer studies, sexuality studies, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, critical whiteness theory, fat studies, sociology, and educational philosophy. They featured radically skeptical and standpoint epistemologies rooted in postmodernism, feminist and critical race epistemology rooted in critical social constructivism as well as psychoanalysis (Lindsay, Boghossian, & Pluckrose, 2018).

There is much disagreement among scholars as to whether this stunt was amusing or constituted researcher misconduct (see https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-the-Grievance/244753?cid=wcontentgrid_hp_6 a variety of viewpoints). I use this example not to

focus on the controversies concerning what these authors label as "grievance studies" – but rather to think about what we need to do to prepare new scholars to conduct quality research and be responsible peer reviewers of their colleagues' work. We all need to be wary, to be critical, and to take nothing at face value. In an age of fake news, in which faked research has been submitted to journals in research areas that frequently make use of qualitative methods, understanding how to assess quality research with respect to different approaches used is an essential skill for our students. Students must take seriously calls to design and conduct rigorous qualitative studies that demonstrate quality, provide the rationales for their decision-making, and learn how to assess the quality of qualitative research using a particular theoretical and methodological approach in their discipline of interest.

Take a moment now to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing that you have noticed about how quality is assessed in qualitative inquiry. What do you want to convey to your students? If you are a student, write down one thing that you want your instructors to know about learning how to assess the quality of published work.

> Kate: **I have found it helpful to have criteria.** I loved Tracy's (2010) "Eight big-tent criteria." It took time for me to make sense of how to apply these, and it doesn't seem like some "experts" in the field of research appreciate the depth and lengths it takes to enhance quality in a qualitative study. It's HARD to include all aspects in a journal manuscript in my field. I often get the comment: "Your methods section is too long."
>
> Anna: I advise: **If you're a student reading this, consider recording yourself as your describe your process to a friend, your supervisor, or a colleague**. The same (or similar) verbal process can be transferred to the written form. Unfortunately, what tends to happen is that students will meet with me to discuss their research and describe their process in perfect detail. For instance, they may lead me through an exciting journey of finding their participants, talking with them, and understanding the interviews. Then they go home to document this within their paper and the majority of the details are missing, generalized, or altered to a type of academese that loses its appeal. Although it is can be an awkward process, to write in (excruciating?) detail the step-by-step thought-process, the meandering path used, hearing about the process, the skips, stumbles, reflections, and boosts that created the project provide both the evidence to students' working knowledge of research and also a recipe for others to use or experiment with.

5. Dealing with change

My next point will be no surprise to readers. Change is always going to occur. Throughout history people have considered the past while planning for the future. If we look to leading scholars of qualitative inquiry, we can see that they introduced new ideas to their disciplines, and they stretched and crossed boundaries. They did things differently and created change in their fields of interest. Their work was not always initially well received, however. If you read the writing of Elliot Eisner, Liora Bresler, Laurel Richardson, Norman Denzin, Kenneth Gergen, Carolyn Ellis, and Art Bochner among others, you will find that in spite of criticisms, they have continued to try new approaches. In teaching qualitative inquiry, we want to encourage students to take risks; but we also want them to be aware of traditions, and to avoid the two extremes represented by those who want to "throw the baby out with the

bathwater," and those who represent a Luddite position, in which any change is viewed antagonistically.

As a teacher of qualitative research, this means that I need to constantly update my knowledge and skills, learn about new approaches, and think about how teaching might be approached differently. The rapidly changing world of qualitative research encompasses staying abreast of new policies and procedures to do with ethical review boards and human subjects' research such as the Revised Common Rule implemented in 2019 in the United States. We need to acquaint ourselves with initiatives in data archiving, learn how to make use of digital tools for research and teaching, and come to an understanding of theoretical and methodological innovations. Last, but not least, we need to keep up to date with new research conducted on our topics of interest. Doing this is no small challenge. Fortunately, we do not have to do this alone. We have wonderful resources at our disposal—including *The Qualitative Report's* extensive website, a range of well-established and newer journals, numerous conferences that accept and support qualitative research, and all manner of online resources and learning opportunities that we can access. By my recent count there are at least 7 regular conferences dedicated to qualitative research and over 30 journals that focus on publishing qualitative research and making methodological contributions.

Take a moment now to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing that you do to initiate change in how you conduct research, and one strategy that you use to cope with change. If you are a student, write down one thing that you want your instructors to know about new issues or questions that you've become aware of in conducting qualitative inquiry.

> Kate: I had this experience of qualitative inquiry as being "new to me" and then found myself having to advocate for qualitative work in my department/field. School districts don't seem to value qualitative inquiry unless it is directly related to achievement.
>
> Anna: I've been pushed to cope with change through my participants. In a recent international study, we had a full protocol planned to interview each participant over Skype or Zoom. Yet participants started text messaging us about their experiences, telling us bits and pieces of their story through Facebook messenger. Then we learned that for many of our participants—mothers in academia, "motherscholars"—they wanted to share their experiences but finding a convenient hour for an interview was particularly challenging, especially for those with young children. Our participants' needs made us confront our willingness to be flexible and make a change in our overall study design.[7]

6. Learning to speak to multiple audiences

Finally, in recent years we have seen unprecedented change in access to knowledge, as well as how that knowledge is represented to the public beyond the academy. Participants of our studies are likely to read publications from our studies. Findings from a study are now disseminated via TED talks, websites, YouTube videos, Tweets and Facebook posts. Along with this proliferation of information, researchers are tasked with explaining themselves to an ever-more skeptical public. Why should our research be funded? What is significant about our topics of interest? How do we explain complex concepts to people outside our fields of interest? How might we write in ways that are understood by others? In the past, scholars have not

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[7] See CohenMiller, Demers, and Schnackenberg (2018) for further information.

always had to account for the significance of their work to the public. We've simply expected our students to learn about research that we present to them in our classes. We may not have had to explain ourselves to audiences beyond our small circles of like-minded colleagues. This sometimes leads to writing that is obscure or even incomprehensible to all but a few scholarly colleagues. In teaching qualitative research, we can help our students think about how they present themselves to multiple audiences. As scholars we need to be able to effectively convey our work to not only the particular discipline and area of study in which our work is situated, but to audiences beyond our scholarly colleagues. To do that, both we and our students need to become comfortable with different writing styles and genres as well as multiple modes of representing our work.

As one example, Geo Takach, who is a Canadian scholar of environmental communication at the Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia not only writes articles and books for academic audiences (e.g., Takach, 2017), but has produced several documentary films, and written a musical eco-comedy play, and radio and television scripts. He is an advocate of arts-based research to bring the findings from his research to audiences outside the academy. I'm not suggesting here that we should all make documentary films or do arts-based inquiry. Rather, we can each consider the ways in which we might assist students to convey what they learn from their research to others in multiple modalities. For example, several years ago when my colleague Judith Preissle retired, I was bequeathed a website begun by another qualitative researcher, Judy Norris. In updating the website, I began blogging—a new genre of writing for me—as a way to discuss qualitative methods (see: https://qualpage.com).

Take a moment now to write down some thoughts about this issue in teaching and learning. If you are a faculty member or instructor, write down one thing you do, or would like to do, to share your work with multiple audiences. If you are a student, write down one approach that you might use to convey findings from your research to multiple audiences.

> Kate: I think that perhaps in my field, it would take presenting quantitative data first and then provide possible qualitative perspectives that support that data – but this is NOT ideal. "Implications" and "change" are key in my field of education.
>
> Anna: I have shared my work with multiple audiences through developing initiatives, such as The Motherscholar Project (www.motherscholar.org), an arts-based awareness, community building, and empowerment campaign that was the outcome of a grant-funded qualitative research study. For the future, I can see the utility of expanding more deeply into public scholarship to speak to major issues on social justice and equity in education. This then relates back to the concept of ambiguity and finding a way to reconcile that aspect of qualitative research with the "sound bites" often needed in a more public forum.

Here, I've presented some issues that I encounter in teaching in qualitative research. No doubt, readers will have other issues to foreground and add to these.

Conclusion

Conducting qualitative inquiry is a privilege. We learn about other people's lives and stories. It is an honor and a joy to pass on one's love for qualitative inquiry to others through our teaching. I urge you not to resort to rote teaching methods. Think carefully about what you teach and how you convey what you know to your students. Don't take the easy path. When we as teachers step outside our comfort zones, learn about approaches that make us

uncomfortable, and study ideas that we find hard to grasp, we encourage our students to do the same. And together we can develop humility, as we come to understand the magnitude of what we still don't know. I don't know what the right path to teaching is for you. I do know that there are many ways, and that with each new course I teach, I try to chart a fresh path with a new group of students. Suzuki (1970, p. 127) states that "there should not be any particular teaching. Teaching is in each moment, in every existence. That is the true teaching."

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Article Citation

Roulston, K. (2019). Preparing researchers to conduct interdisciplinary, multi-method qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(9), 2263-2280. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss9/12