

Chapter 10

Learning and Teaching Qualitative Data Analysis in a US University: Creating Supports and Scaffolds for Researcher Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study that examines how the learning experience of graduate students enrolled in a seminar at a US university prepares them to conduct qualitative research, specifically data analysis. Adult development theory and literature related to doctoral student preparation for research and curriculum development informed the course design and data analysis. The research questions focus on course structure, pedagogical strategies, how doctoral students experience these aspects in learning qualitative research methods, and how faculty learned to identify and meet students' emerging needs. Findings include contextualized examples of how the course supported students, how students received feedback in developmentally different ways, and the role of student resistance and emotion in learning. This chapter highlights the need to create a context of supports and challenges for learners and illuminates the benefits of a constructivist curriculum with scaffolding for doctoral student development and learning to become a qualitative researcher.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-7409-7.ch010

INTRODUCTION

In universities throughout the world, faculty examine questions related to improving the preparation of educational researchers (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Lugg & Shoho, 2006). Some scholars explore critical epistemological questions concerning education such as what knowledge counts, what constitutes evidence, and what exactly is quality education research (Kristof, 2014; Southerland, Gadsden, & Herrington, 2014; Young, 2001); while others engage in inquiry about theoretical approaches and what core methods should be taught (Bredo, 2009; Howe, 2009). Still other scholars and educational researchers struggle with questions about the type of preparation needed not only to prepare educational researchers for today's challenges, but also for the complex demands of future educational research (Anderson, 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Lagemann, 2002; Page, 2001).

Enhancing doctoral student research preparation (and by extension future research) is at the forefront of teaching and learning efforts in the academy (Eisenhart & DeHaan, 2005; Lagemann & Shulman, 1999; Pallas, 2001). Yet, there is a little discourse about doctoral curricula (Golde, 2007; Olson & Clark, 2009). Furthermore, there is a dearth of research (see Metz, 2001; Maxwell, 2012) that specifically examines how graduate methodological coursework educates and supports doctoral students to meet the complex demands of becoming skilled educational researchers (Maxwell, 2012; Pallas, 2001). Education faculty, scholars, and students alike cite the need to re-envision doctoral preparation of educational researchers and urge discussion about and investigation into these critical matters (Page, 2001). Such dialogue and research will provide guidance as to how education faculty might improve practice and develop more useful methods courses, illuminate the problems and possibilities of teaching and learning qualitative methods, and create widespread knowledge about more effective methods for preparing doctoral student researchers in the field of education.

This chapter focuses on learnings from teaching an interdisciplinary qualitative data analysis (QDA) seminar that brings together doctoral students who are engaged with or preparing for doctoral dissertation research in various fields related to education at a graduate school of education at a US university. In particular, this research describes: (1) the seminar structure/context and how it worked to facilitate the development of a research community, (2) the various and diverse andragogy strategies, classroom practice, and exercises employed to support student learning, and (3) contextualized examples of how doctoral students made sense of their learning experiences throughout the semester. The goal of this research is two-fold: (1) to raise awareness of effective practices for preparing doctoral student researchers for qualitative research, specifically in relation to data analysis, and (2) to illuminate what we learned about how andragogy, curriculum, and embedded scaffolds (i.e., supports and challenges that were threaded through course design) sustained students' learning over time in this seminar. We offer our learning experiences and strategies as a useful map to other educators and researchers.

Here, we examine how 17 (15 doctoral and 2 masters) students enrolled in different concentration programs across the university experienced the seminar. In particular, through the strategies to support student learning (i.e., reflections from our teaching observations, student meetings, memo assignments, data analysis convenings, journal entries, observations of AERA-style class conference presentations, mid-semester and end-of-term course evaluations, and teaching team meetings) we sought to understand how students in the QDA course developed over time as qualitative researchers.

The practical and theoretical questions guiding this study are: (1) How might faculty shape course structure as a space to support doctoral students' development as researchers and their learning of qualitative analytic strategies in their university classrooms? (2) What kinds of andragogical strat-

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