

Chapter 4

Navigators on the Research Path: Supporting Student Qualitative Researchers

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research methods courses are required in most doctoral and some Master's degree graduate programs. However, although many graduate students enter their programs with some knowledge of quantitative methodology, many have little to no understanding of qualitative research methodologies. There are many challenges associated with teaching qualitative research, and although most learners in qualitative research classes are adult learners, university faculty members may not know or understand adult learning theories and teaching strategies to frame their approaches to teaching qualitative research methods. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the challenges faced by faculty members who plan and teach qualitative research courses using the literature to highlight current qualitative research pedagogy while discussing new strategies and models that may assist graduate students' development as qualitative researchers. An earlier version of this chapter can be found in V. Wang's (Ed.) Handbook of Research on Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods (2015).

INTRODUCTION

Denzin and Lincoln contend that “Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter. A complex interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions surround the term” (2013, p. 5). Marshall and Rossman (2016) further expand on these ideas, discussing qualitative research as “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena” (p. 3), affirming qualitative research as an increasingly accepted research methodology that is important to many fields, such as education, social work, community work, health sciences, nursing, and management. However, although qualitative research has become more accepted and courses in it are taught in universities,

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many graduate students' knowledge of research is still quantitatively focused, which may cause them frustration when they begin qualitative courses.

For example, almost 30 years ago when I was a new doctoral student in an adult and community education program, I had little knowledge of qualitative inquiry, and my understandings of research methodologies were statistical applications to research problems and designs and the findings of such research. Nevertheless, as I progressed through my doctoral program of study and began to read research studies grounded in the fields of education, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and organizational studies, I encountered qualitative inquiry and research that deepened my interest and knowledge. The one required qualitative methodology course in my program focused on ethnography, and despite this class being embedded in a doctoral program focusing on adult education and adult learning principals, the course was conducted in a very didactic manner, with readings (i.e., Spradley, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 1993; Patton, 1987), lectures, and little interactive engagement activities. Students were expected to conduct an individual ethnographic project as a major learning outcome, so I became immersed in studying qualitative methodologies. Later on, through my own self-directed learning of the ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2008) and conducting my own small qualitative studies, I eventually proposed, carried out, and defended a mixed methodology dissertation (Hansman-Ferguson, 1995). Subsequently, through my own self-directed learning concerning qualitative research and engaging in projects, I gained valuable experience as a qualitative researcher.

My affinity as a qualitative researcher remained with me when I began my career as an assistant professor at a Midwestern university and I was asked to teach the introductory, and then later, the advanced qualitative research methodologies classes in my university's multi-disciplinary doctoral program in Urban Education. I used my own experiences as a researcher as my foundation for planning these classes, but as I continued teaching these courses, I began to search for teaching resources and pedagogical strategies for teaching qualitative research methodology. However, I found little research or work to inform instructors of qualitative research on "best" practices for helping students develop into researchers. It was discouraging, and as Eatkin and Mykhalovskiy (2005) note "Training needs for qualitative science are significantly different than those for natural science, and have to be both conceptualized and realized in different ways. Producing high quality researchers requires much more than methodological training; the need for theoretical knowledge and understanding puts special demands on educational programs".

Qualitative research methods courses are required in most doctoral and some master degree graduate programs. Conversely, although many graduate students enter their programs with some knowledge of and experience using quantitative methodology, most graduate students have little to no understanding of qualitative research methodologies. There are many challenges associated with teaching qualitative research methods in institutions that promotes and embrace numerically based forms of knowledge over other types of research methodologies. Despite some research studies and "how to" discussions concerning teaching qualitative research method courses (i.e., Eakin & Mykhalovskiy, 2005; Carawan, Knight, Wittman, Pokorny, & Velde, 2011; Cobb & Hoffart, 1999; Cook & Gordon, 2004; DeLyser, 2008; Delyser et al., 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Globerman & Chan, 2000; Hansman, 2015a, 2015b; Henderson et al., 2008; Kleinman, Copp & Henderson, 1997; McAllister & Rowe, 2003; Munn, 2016; Poulin, 2007; Probst, Harris, Pehm, Lindquist, Mora, Hallas & Sandoval, 2016; Ramani & Mann, 2016; Silverman, 2010; Slayton & Samkian, 2017; Stark & Watson, 1999; Waite, 2011, 2014), there is little "training" for faculty members who teach qualitative research courses. In addition, although most students in qualitative research classes are adult learners, adult learning theories and teaching strategies may not be a preferred approach by qualitative instructors and are ignored in favor of unengaging didactic teaching methods.

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