

Chapter 9

Navigators on the Research Path: Teaching and Mentoring Student Qualitative Researchers

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research methods courses have become common or required in most doctoral and some master's degree graduate programs' curricula. However, although many graduate students enter their programs with some knowledge of quantitative methodology, they have little to no understanding of qualitative research methodologies. There are many challenges associated with teaching qualitative research in a context that promotes and embraces numerically based forms of knowledge and marginalizes other types of research. In addition, although most learners in qualitative research classes are adult learners, adult learning theories and teaching strategies may not be a preferred approach by qualitative instructors. 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 developing graduate students as qualitative researchers in their graduate programs and their future careers.

INTRODUCTION

When I entered graduate school as a doctoral student, my understandings of research methodologies were mainly focused on quantitative statistical methods. At the time I was not particularly well-versed in research methodology, but I understood statistical applications to research problems and designs and the findings of such

research. However, 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 research studies of many different genres. In my doctoral program, I was only required to take one qualitative methodology course, which focused on ethnography, and despite this class

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being embedded in a doctoral program focusing on adult education and adult learning principals, the class was conducted in a very didactic manner, with readings (i.e., Spradley, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 1993; Patton, 1987), lectures, little interactive engagement via class discussions, and students were expected to conduct an individual ethnographic project. Nevertheless, I became immersed in studying qualitative methodologies, and through my own self-directed attention to 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). So through my own self-directed learning concerning qualitative research and engaging in projects, I gained 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 beginning, 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, as "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" (Eakin & Mykhalovskiy, 2005).

Qualitative research methods courses have become common or required in most doctoral

and some master degree graduate programs' curricula. However, although many graduate students enter their programs with some knowledge of quantitative methodology, most students have little to no understanding of qualitative research methodologies. There are many challenges associated with teaching qualitative research in a context that promotes and embraces numerically based forms of knowledge and marginalizes other types of research. 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; Globberman & Chan, 2000; Henderson et al., 2008; Hsinung, 2011; Kleinman, Copp & Henderson, 1997; McAllister & Rowe, 2003; Poulin, 2007; Silverman, 2010; 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 ignored in favor of unengaging didactic teaching 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 highlighting current qualitative research pedagogy while discussing new strategies and models that may assist developing graduate students as qualitative researchers in their graduate programs and their future careers. This chapter will begin by discussing the complex nature of qualitative research along with the challenges faced by faculty members who endeavor to design and teach qualitative research classes. Next, adult learning theories, concepts, and methods that may frame teaching qualitative research are examined, followed by a discussion of literature related to specific methods used by experienced qualitative teachers in their classrooms. The chapter will

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