

The Experience of Learning/Teaching Qualitative Research Approaches: An Ethnographic Autobiography

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to use reflexive methodology to describe the emotions and experiences of doctoral students and a professor who collaboratively conducted a research study using triangulated qualitative research data. The study was the major learning strategy in a doctoral seminar focusing on qualitative research approaches. In using an ethnographic autobiography, the authors were the subjects of their own research. Data were examined from journals kept by the students and the instructor during the semester. Four themes are discussed: learning by risk-taking, learning by doing, learning by working together, and learning by reflection. The value of examining learners' emotions and implications for teaching research methods using experiential learning are addressed.

KEYWORDS: Learning, leisure, methodology, recreation, teaching

Qualitative approaches to researching issues in park, recreation, sport, tourism, and leisure studies are more commonly used today than in the past. For example, in an analysis of the four major research journals in the U. S., the percentage of manuscripts that used theory or model development doubled from the studies examined between 1981-1990 (Henderson, 1994) and the studies done

between 1992-2002 ((Henderson, Presley, & Bialeschki, 2004). With this “trend” has come the need to explore techniques for teaching future researchers how to appropriately and rigorously use these approaches. Many doctoral curricula including our own at North Carolina State University require students to take 9-12 credits of statistics, but few mandate a qualitative data course. Nevertheless, many faculty members recognize that students need knowledge regarding qualitative data.

In a study conducted in 1995, faculty and graduate students agreed that learning both qualitative and quantitative approaches to empirical research was important (Weissinger, Bowling, & Henderson, 1996). Weissinger, Bowling, and Henderson’s study found that most faculty members described how qualitative data collection and analysis were generally part of a broader research methods course, and the content was often relegated to a class period or two. Although quantitative data remain the *sine qua non* in our field, qualitative approaches have a great deal to offer. Some professionals may never conduct a study using these approaches, but they will inevitably need to evaluate qualitative data during their careers.

The traditional scientific method, however, is generally engrained in most students by the time they reach doctoral studies. We learn that “real” science consists of doing an exhaustive literature review, stating a problem and specific hypotheses, writing a proposal, and collecting data to test the hypotheses (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1997). We are taught to put aside our emotions and remain “objective.” Therefore, when teaching or learning qualitative approaches to research, a good deal of “control” over research appears to be “given up.” Many students, as well as faculty, may feel uncomfortable using qualitative approaches due to their previous academic experiences. However, students who receive opportunities to learn about and practice qualitative data analyses, even though they may feel some cognitive dissonance, are likely to recognize its value and application.

This paper used reflexive methodology (Dupuis, 1999) to address the purpose of describing our experiences as doctoral students and a professor who conducted a research project in a community senior center as a learning strategy in a qualitative research course. This approach was akin to autoethnography, which is defined as an approach that demonstrates how the self plays into qualitative research (Henderson, 2006). The analysis presented, however, is not directly about the interaction between us and our study participants as occurs in many autoethnographies, but about our emotions and lived experience in collaboratively conducting a research project. As authors, we are the subjects of this ethnography. Thus, we called this approach ethnographic autobiography (Couser, 2005).

Autoethnography and Research

The traditional scientific method has not only dictated the epistemology and methodology used in conducting research, but also the protocols for reporting findings. Students are typically taught that academic writing should be distant with an authoritative tone and should “stand on the shoulder of previous theorists” (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1997, p. 488). Research is often portrayed in traditional writing as “orderly, neat, and consistent” (Dupuis, 1999, p. 55). However,

to fully describe some research topics, new approaches to analysis and writing may be necessary.

Debate surrounds the privileging of traditional scientific method with the assumption that interpretive accounts should be reported in the same manner as positivist reports (Parry & Johnson, 2007). An alternative to this “crisis of representation” (p. 119) is creative analytic process (CAP) that allows for innovative presentations of data in the form of stories, visual images, poetry, performances, personal stories, and autoethnography. Dupuis (1999) advocated for what she described as a reflexive methodology that acknowledges “that our selves and personal experiences cannot be removed from the research process” (p. 59).

According to Dupuis (1999), reflexive research includes several necessary strategies. This research requires the conscious inclusion of the full self in recognizing how researchers’ developmental history and personality influences all aspects of the research process from the questions chosen to writing the report. Reflexive researchers recognize the collaborative role that participants and researchers play in interpreting the meanings of data. Further, reflexivity enables researchers to examine their taken-for-granted values that inevitably influence research (Pellatt, 2003). Adopting a reflexive approach means that reporting research may be done in a number of ways (Dupuis, 1999) including the possibilities for CAP (Parry & Johnson, 2007).

Autoethnography is one possibility within CAP. Ethnography typically focuses on interpreting the lives of others. Autoethnography involves an examination of the self related to others within a social context (e.g., Berger, 2001; Couser, 2005; Vidal-Ortiz, 2004). However, as with McCarville’s (2007) autoethnography about his experience as an Ironman triathlete, this form of CAP can portray oneself as the subject of the research, which is called ethnographic autobiography.

Alternative representations of data such as autoethnography are important for some types of data and not for others (Richardson, 2002). Writing in different genres does not guarantee a better product (Richardson, 2000). Using CAP does not mean that rigor is not important. For us, writing through an ethnographic autobiography provided a way not only to describe what happened during the learning process, but to describe how we experienced our research.

The Importance of Emotion in Autoethnography

Examining the experience of any phenomenon requires a focus on emotions. In collecting qualitative data, researchers have emphasized the importance of taking emotions into account (e.g., Bedini & Henderson, 1995/96; Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1997; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Zembylas, 2003). Some researchers have discussed how to deal with the emotions of participants as well as those of the researchers, Austerlitz, (2006); Zembylas, (2005). Kleinman, Copp, and Henderson, (1997) suggested to students that “feelings are to be *used* rather than erased” (p. 477), whether in interacting with participants or in being self-reflective.

Hochschild (1983) described emotional labor that occurs in many occupations as managing feelings, both positive and negative, while on the job. Hubbard, Back-

ett-Milburn, and Kemmer (2001) described the epistemology of labor in terms of how emotion contributes to understanding and knowledge when doing research. Teaching and learning are emotional experiences. Zembylas (2005) explored how teachers need to explore their emotions if they want to understand their teaching since teaching includes more than cognition and belief. Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, and Perry (2002) also found that students experienced a range of emotions (i.e., both positive and negative) while learning. These emotions also affected students' interest and motivation and the approach they took to their learning.

Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, and Kemmer (2001) described a number of emotional issues in doing research as well as working in research teams. Researchers, especially those who collect qualitative data whether solo or as a team, have to determine how to manage different types of emotional issues such as friendship, distress, participant emotions, and emotions about the processes. A fine line often exists between managing emotions and making them integral to the research (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2001). Ironically, great lengths are taken through Institutional Review Boards to protect human subjects, and yet little acknowledgement is given to how researchers manage their own emotions. Most students as well as teachers receive little guidance about how to use the emotions that arise (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1997). Further, relying on others for emotional validation and support does not have to diminish research in any way. As Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, and Kemmer suggested, the greatest challenge in using qualitative data may lie in acknowledging that emotions have epistemological value. Thus, the purpose of this paper was to use reflexive methodology to describe our emotions and lived experiences in doing research as a class project.

Methods

"Qualitative Research Approaches" was a special topics course offered to doctoral students in the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management Department at North Carolina State University. Six students who were either in their first or second year in the doctoral program and one instructor, who had conducted a number of studies using qualitative data and was teaching this seminar for the second time, were involved. The syllabus had several dimensions; its general description read:

This course is designed to provide an introduction to the application of the interpretive paradigm and the management of qualitative data applied to research in parks, recreation, sport, and tourism management. We will examine the assumptions of the interpretive approach and the relationship between methods and research questions. In this process we will assess various studies in PRTM that use qualitative approaches and apply techniques for data collection, management, and interpretation. We will discuss procedures, the role of the "self" in conducting research, and issues and ethics that arise.

We were expected to do the assigned readings for each class (e.g., Henderson, 2006 and Strauss & Corbin, 1998, as well as other journal articles and book chapters), come prepared to discuss questions that arose from the readings, do a co-

presentation regarding a specific research method, complete three article critiques, keep a reflection journal, conduct a group study using qualitative approaches, and present a solid draft of the study's methods, findings, and discussion by the end of the semester. A major portion of each class period was devoted to a "workshop" that focused on the progress of the research and the issues that we faced emotionally and cognitively while doing the research project. Further, the directions from the syllabus regarding the journal were:

Each of you will keep a journal reflecting on your thoughts and learnings from this class. You are asked to write at least one page a week (typed) kept in a word file throughout the semester. The journal is due....The instructor will draft a journal article for *Scholar* and you will have a chance to have input to the article (and will be listed as a co-author).

About 75 one-page journal entries from all of us (including the instructor) were analyzed by the instructor using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding referred to identifying concepts and their properties followed by axial coding to relate the concepts to categories and subcategories. We shared drafts of these ideas and offered feedback in framing and theorizing the data. Coding was initially done only by the instructor because of a misunderstanding in the class. The instructor stated the first day of class that each student would have access to the data in all the journals, but this statement was not made clear in the syllabus and one student was not aware that the journals would be seen by more than the instructor in preparing this paper. This student wrote in the last journal entry:

...committing my thoughts, fears, insecurities to paper where others might find them...well let it suffice to say that the term "vulnerable" is an understatement. I almost fell out of my chair [the last day of class] when [instructor] indicated that she would share our individual journals with the class. I have actually gone back and deleted portions of my original entries—that now seem too personal to share.

Therefore, the instructor was the only one to have full access to all journal data even though all the students reviewed drafts of the paper and were aware before the journals were completed that the drafts would be shared.

The journals reflected on all aspects of the course, but only the experiential research content is discussed in this paper. The research project was a single case study that included observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with older adults at a community senior center. The case study analysis focused on the health, wellness, and physical activity experiences of older adults at the center. This topic was selected because it was an area of interest to the instructor and paralleled another project underway. Further, several of us had a particular interest either in physical activity, sport, and/or older adults. Two students did not have this focus but agreed that the project could be interesting. The goal of the project was to learn about qualitative research, but a secondary objective was to submit two papers for publication: one about the outcomes of the case study, and a second (this paper) about the research experience.

Although the setting in a senior center influenced our experiences as researchers, this paper focuses on the teaching and learning of qualitative research

approaches as we experienced them. Although the professor was responsible for “teaching” the course, all were learners and this account describes learning from both the student and faculty perspective. In the journal analyses we uncovered four themes describing the learning that we experienced: learning by risk-taking, learning by doing, learning by working together, and learning by reflection. These four areas are presented as a composite ethnographic autobiography using the data reported in the journal entries. The comments of the instructor are noted since they may present a different perspective regarding these experiences of learning.

The Experience of Learning

Learning by Risk Taking

Because many students have not had previous opportunities to conduct projects using qualitative data and because the class was not required of all doctoral students, risk-taking seemed to describe the mindset as the course commenced. Risk-taking was also evident for the instructor since the issues and outcomes of this experiential learning approach were unknown. A narrative follows regarding how risk-taking was evidenced at the beginning and to some extent during the entire semester.

(Instructor) I have never tried a project on a class basis before. I was frustrated with the class the last time I taught because things seemed rather disjointed toward the end. I am hoping that having a project to focus on will provide a better understanding of the big picture and not just the pieces of this type of research. I do feel a little guilty that maybe I have pushed my research agenda on the students, but we had to start somewhere and I promised that I would deal with the connections to literature if they would focus on collecting and analyzing data.

(Student) I really like the applied aspect of working together on a research project. The idea of using the class period as a workshop should make the usually grueling three-hour block a little more manageable. However, the project seems complicated. I like having the chance to do observations and focus groups. I haven't done them before. Still I'm not sure we will get it all done during the class. I also hate group projects. I know all the research says that you learn more yadda, yadda. It always seems to be more trouble than it is worth for me.

(Student) I've been predominantly a quantitative researcher to this point. However, the reasoning has been out of convenience and background. I ask myself if I knew more about qualitative research, would I do it? Are others in the same position?... (Another student) I'm fairly good with SPSS and applied statistics, but I am hoping to broaden my horizons in terms of exploring possibilities.

(Student) The article [Kleinman et al., 1997] touched upon my reservations, fears, and concerns about performing qualitative research. There were many “aha” and “laugh out loud” moments. I decided that I am a “cynical superscientist” according to the article as I have concerns both about researcher bias and participants being truthful and not altering their responses (consciously or not) in an effort to “tell me what I want to hear.” I further worry about the notion of “self-fulfilling prophecy” in that no matter what the data say, I will (unconsciously) hear what I want to hear or see what I want to see, or interpret what I want the data to mean as being consistent with my own biases, philosophies, and theories.

(Instructor) *The class overall is fairly quiet. I still sense some skepticism but it may be that discomfort that comes with not knowing exactly what we will uncover. I am still feeling a little unsure about whether or not all of this is going to work. Can we accomplish the project in a way that is trustworthy and not run out of time? How do we go about making sure that the study is "believable?" I think we have some challenges before us.... At some point I may have to pull the plug if we don't seem to get the information collected in the best manner... I [still] feel a little uncomfortable with being rather "dictatorial" about the study, but we just didn't have time to sit down and hammer out everything together. I hope that I haven't oversimplified what this is about... I also feel the time pressure. I just have to look at this as somewhat of an experiment.*

(Student) *I'm still a little fuzzy about how this is all going to work. I guess it will become plainer to me as we do it. Are we really all going to agree on the same codes? How does that work in practice when you're collaborating? Do you end up with the best codes, or just the codes of whoever speaks up more? Can we do a good job generating [interview] questions without doing the literature review ourselves?... If I don't know what's out there, how can I formulate intelligent questions?... Honestly, this whole research project is anxiety producing...The process of doing the observations and getting participants for the interviews is going to be no fun at all for me.*

(Another student) *Research for the sake of research seems esoteric and elitist, and, quite frankly, a waste of energy. Research that leads to improving the quality of life for people and communities, and to assisting professionals... now that seems like a worthwhile project!*

Learning by Doing

Learning by "hands-on" doing is not always the approach taken in graduate school as much of the content is learned through reading and writing and not by doing projects in communities. The instructor had previously taught this course without using a holistic experiential approach. In the previous year, students had practiced various elements of the qualitative research process, but had not done an integration of the elements of data collection, analysis, and writing. The following autobiographical narrative describes these elements as they were undertaken by the students and the instructor.

(Student) *I am intrigued by the methodology we will be using this semester. Most of the research I am familiar with has the Literature Review section in the obvious beginning of the paper...How interesting this will be to have an idea of what we want to find out, gather data, see what that looks like and what literature might relate, then gather more data, find out more, draw some conclusions from what is revealed, and make some recommendations. This "back and forth" between data collection, analysis, literature review, and conclusion drawing is new for me.*

(Another Student) *This week we did [center]observations instead of having class. My observation sessions confused me. I visited Lite Aerobics and Seniors of Steel. The first 30 minutes of observations I felt like I was really getting somewhere. I was writing down routines of the participants and descriptions of the room. Then I hit a wall. Was any of this telling me anything? Maybe it's too early to have these feelings. Being young, I do not know what it feels like to be them.*

(Student) Observing the activities was a good experience. I feel as though I often do observe people's behavior (i.e., diners at a restaurant or passengers at an airport), but it was a good experience for me to, in a sense, observe my own observations. I was more careful and approached the observations from a scientific perspective. It was also interesting for me to watch and think about the leisure activities of seniors. I thought about my parents and how they should, and easily could, do something like this to get some regular exercise.

(Another Student) We did our focus group today. I was more nervous knowing that what I said was going to be transcribed and shared with the class because then everyone would know that I asked too many closed ended questions and would think I'm incompetent to do this research. One woman seemed to have input (much of it off topic) on everything. "Mae" answered questions for herself, other participants, her sister, me, and everyone! I felt as a moderator, I should've been able to control this better. It's difficult to interrupt someone when they are speaking genuinely... I did make a few attempts, but she even talked through when I was dismissing the group. This...may have just been the person, not my inefficiency... a learning process for sure.

(Student) I can understand better now the practical challenges that face researchers who want to gather data and information directly and interactively from their participants. I guess a big lesson... is to plan my research time lines a bit more pessimistically than I would otherwise do. I can't afford to put interviews/focus groups off until the last minute... I cannot predict what kinds of road blocks or detours I may face... Allowing ample lead time will give me more cushion for absorbing the unexpected delays. A key aspect in collecting this kind of data is knowing (or not knowing!) how much data is enough. Saturation could come quickly or it could require more interviews than I had anticipated... Also, I need to be respectful of the schedules of those I interview.

(Student) Today I did my last interview. The guy was a real character. I hardly had to ask him questions at all. Hopefully that makes up for the first interviewee who was not so forthcoming. We had scheduled the interview for ½ hour before his class. I would have ended the interview but he wasn't done talking for another 20 minutes.

(Another Student) I did my portion of the transcribing of the focus group yesterday. It was a bit tedious, but I really enjoyed getting to relive the discussion... listening again to what they said and typing it helped me better understand who they are as people.

(Instructor) I feel good about the interviews the students did. When I read them over I was quite impressed with the detailed probing that most of them did. I feel technically they got a good experience. I just hope that we come up with something that seems to make sense when we put all these pieces together in the end... I need to be patient because sometimes I think things should happen faster than they do.

(Student) I have to admit the amount of data we have to code and bring together seems a little overwhelming. I really hope we are not biting off more than we can chew with this project. I did feel pretty good today about my own abilities to use Atlas.ti from a software standpoint. I'm beginning to feel a little time crunch in being able to get everything together by the end of the semester. I'm starting to really freak out about time, though... How on earth are we going to get this done in time? When are we going to write? Do we even know what we (as a class) think of our data? I'm not even sure I know what I think of our data.

(Another Student) The “workshop” element of class was the most useful to me. Everything began to make even more sense when we went through the observation notes and a focus group transcription to begin listing examples of coding. It was good to go through the exercises and get a better feel for how coding works.

(Student) Trying to code in Atlas this past week was frustrating. I hate technology!!! Further, this software is without a doubt the least user-friendly software I have ever seen. I could not have done it without explicit directions... and I’m pretty sure I could not do it on my own in the future.

(Another Student) Our second in class workshop about coding, went better than the first time we tried to agree on codes... there was tremendous overlap—I guess that would be the “families” piece of the coding. Two people made reference to possible theoretical connections. On the one hand that was encouraging for the prospect of writing the paper, but I worried that this was “forcing the data” to make writing the paper easier. Being left on our own [instructor was not there] allowed everyone to step up and put into action a lot of the information we had covered.

(Instructor) I think the thing I have struggled with most related to the amount of information I should give the students for guidance and then the amount that they need to figure out on their own, especially when it comes to the coding issues. I still don’t feel great about whether or not we are doing the pulling together right, but I guess we will see as the next three weeks unfold. I hope we end up with something interesting...

(Student) I think today provided a good example of how more feedback would have been helpful throughout the semester. I think I get the open coding a little better now... I really don’t know how we are going to pull this whole thing together in any semblance of a concise “model” or theory. I feel like we’re just hanging out there a little bit and that also makes me nervous.

(Another Student) It makes me feel better to know that [instructor] will be working on the final article. She seemed really interested in everyone’s ideas and acted as though she would give each due consideration as she theorizes [further] and writes the introduction and discussion for the paper. It was nice to bring some sense of closure to the course.

Learning by Working Together

Qualitative approaches can be strengthened by using triangulation of data, sources, and/or researchers (Henderson, 2006). As noted in the previous section, mixed-method data collection was undertaken for this project at the senior center. Seven of us provided a multiple “triangulation” for all steps of the research process. Although working with more than one researcher can increase the trustworthiness of qualitative data, working with others can also create challenges as well as opportunities. In the following narrative, we describe our positive as well as negative experiences in working together.

(Student) I feel stretched in this whole process. Yet... one of the most valuable aspects of this course is actually becoming a researcher with my colleagues in this course including [the instructor]. We feel a strong sense of commitment to the project and to learning and growing, which has been exciting. We’ve got some bright soon-to-be professors in this group!

(Another Student) We see things slightly differently as we each come in with different

backgrounds, and notice different aspects of the research. Together we understand so much more than any one of us could alone... a significant lesson for me from this course.

(Student) Within the scope of qualitative research, I learned that if you are working on a group project—keep the goals of the meeting in mind and on task. It's easy to waste time and lose focus when the group loses direction. Each person writing down their most important points before talking was helpful...

(Another Student) I'd say the best things about working with a group were insight and reliability and the worst things were time issues and topical disagreement. I did feel that some comments served as good checks and balances against my interpretation of the data... there were times when some wanted to go in opposite directions or include data that others didn't agree with... I do still feel that the group process went well as a whole.

(Student) Making decisions can be made more difficult sometimes just by virtue of having more people in the room. I'm afraid that's going to make things more difficult when we try to agree on stuff. Maybe it won't, if we've been seeing the same things in the stuff we've been coding. Even if we're seeing the same stuff, are we going to give it the same weight? Does it matter?

(Another Student) Today was pretty incredible. Sorry [instructor], but I am glad you weren't in class today. I really felt like being left on our own allowed everyone to step up and put into action a lot of the information we have been covering during the year. I don't know if everyone would have freely contributed (without looking for approval)... To me, the operational processes (interviewing, transcribing, coding) are the easy parts of qualitative techniques. It's the recognizing themes and pulling it all together that makes me uneasy. I was really proud of myself and everyone else today in how we discussed these axial codes and brought the whole picture into focus.

(Student) The day came when we had to decide the order of authorship for the paper [the instructor had indicated at the beginning of the semester that the author order would be determined by the students with the instructor's name going last]. This was, in itself, a good exercise as the six budding scholars had to decide how to allocate not only credit, but to some extent also how to allocate remaining responsibility... some cared about their positions more than others... They didn't challenge his proposal [the person who volunteered to be listed as first author]. I wonder if that was just because he said something first. There was no debate, only tacit disapproval by those who could have made the same argument for their own names to be first. It made me wonder about how we should operate politically within a department or even within the world of academia. What are the motivations? From this exchange, it seems like the most important motivator may be achievement, but not at the expense of relationships. Maybe it is the relationships that are most important because of the need for collaboration. However... it may be the paper that is ultimately sacrificed as those who receive a lower position than they would like are less inclined to continue to play collaboratively.

Learning by Reflection

Learning can be greatly enhanced by having the opportunity to reflect on the experiences. Through keeping the journals, we had an opportunity each week to think about the class periods and the work we were undertaking regarding the

project. Further, each class period included time to discuss the previous week's experience in data collection, analysis, or writing. This reflection also provided a way to describe the emotions of doing the qualitative study as well as the way we were living this research experience during the semester. Although not described in the journal entries, the writing of this ethnographic autobiography was a form of reflection. The following narrative about learning as reflection identifies some of the feelings we experienced such as joy, uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration.

(Student) *The best way to learn something is to do it. This course has afforded us the opportunity to apply course material on a project of importance. I am so glad [instructor] had deadlines for us along the way ~ to have observations done and transcribed... and focus groups and interviews... ~ the deadlines pushed us to keep this class and project on front burner. The deadlines allowed us all to move forward together to get the project to the place where we had results and could begin the article....*

(Another Student) *I thought that it would have been nice to have one more week of class, so we could have reviewed each other's drafts and refined our thoughts/sections a bit more...*

(Student) *I haven't had many active learning courses. This one pushed me to the limit. The data collection, coding, discussions, and writing were difficult in a short time frame... [however] when I'm busy, it's training for what the future will be like as a tenure track faculty member.*

(Another Student) *It's great that we were aiming at writing an article but I wonder if it would be better to either have students take existing data from a previous study and do a secondary analysis... I felt that we were rushed at the end and I know through conversations that occurred during class and individually that... people did not put the care into analyzing the data and writing the sections as would have occurred in an individual research project... I did not feel immersed in the data until I had to write a segment for our article.*

(Student) *I already had the mechanics down pretty well with how to do qualitative research. What I still don't get very well is the theorizing part. It sounds dumb, but I still can't seem to get that. Give me a set of data and I can tell you how it applies to practice. That's easy. How do you know you have a basis for theory when you see it? What theory can we produce from these data? Does every study really produce theory?*

(Another Student) *Chances are that just about any project would expand to fill the time available. I wish that we had been able to write [rather than just talk about] the discussion/conclusions section, although I guess that's impractical for the time available for the class. You'd have to know the literature. [However] we actually put together a pretty decent study.*

(Instructor) *Would I teach this class this way again? I think so but I wonder if this project was a little bigger than it needed to be. Maybe just doing some in-depth interviews would have given us good data... It will be interesting to see what the students have had to say in their journals and how they evaluate this process... I am also feeling a little trepidation about submitting the article [the one about the findings from the research at the senior center] for publication. I think we have something to say but I really hope that it gets accepted. On the other hand, if it doesn't, perhaps it is a lesson in writing and reviewing.*

(Student) *I think the class should definitely be done as a project. (I say that in spite of the fact that I'm all grumpy about group work.) I think that there's no real substitute for*

actually doing it. You really have to think things through in a way that you wouldn't otherwise. When I looked back on my entries, it struck me how anxious the whole process made me. I suppose that's normal. I was a little skeptical, but in the end we got it done.

Discussion

Using an autobiographical ethnography, we focused on exploring learning within the context of doing a research project. The results showed that we as students and as an instructor learned as a result of risk-taking, doing, working together, and reflecting. The four themes were replete with examples of how our emotions could not be divorced from the classroom or from undertaking this project. Recognizing that emotional labor is necessary for doing qualitative research was an essential part of the learning process. Being reflexive (Dupuis, 1999) is essential in describing the worlds of others as well as our own experiences. Without this purposeful focus on affective reflection over the course of the semester, the class would have been different. The narrative examples showed how the students' and instructor's previous experience and personality influenced the research process. Through this collaborative process, we recognized some of the values and biases that influenced the project as well as our own skills, knowledge, and attitudes about qualitative data.

This study also has several other implications for teaching and learning in the parks, recreation, tourism, sport, and leisure field. First, graduate school can offer opportunities for students to be involved in experiential learning to address issues in communities, in this case an evaluation/analysis of physical activity programs at a senior center. Class sessions and weekly journaling enabled us to do reflection about our community experiences. This strategy for teaching not only provided useful information for the staff at the senior community center that we studied, but also provided a means to connect affective and cognitive learning.

Second, completing a rigorous project was successful because of certain elements: adequate structure, cooperation from a field site, and the commitment of students and the faculty member to a learning process as well as a final product. We were fortunate, in particular, to have staff members at the senior center that were committed to helping us be successful with the project and who were interested in the outcomes for improving their center.

Third, this experience also had the benefit of providing opportunities for us as colleagues to work together collaboratively. We recognize that each seminar class is unique and students and faculty bring different dynamics. However, we were able to collaborate to complete the project within a somewhat bounded timeframe and to submit one paper that has been published (Hickerson et al., 2008).

Finally, combining other assignments (i.e., readings, article reviews, presentations) with a group project and using part of the class each week as a "workshop" or laboratory provided a pedagogical foundation for learning about qualitative approaches. The ultimate value of our experience in the course will be in what we as future researchers and instructors do with qualitative data. We were also able to experiment with a different writing representation in this autobiographical ethnography.

Richardson (2000) indicated that writing in different genres can represent some experiences in a more understandable and consistent way. She also noted, however, that new criteria are necessary to assure that the writing does contribute to the body of knowledge. We feel this work addresses the criteria that Richardson advocated. First, we believe the discussion of this project as an andragogical approach to learning focused on a journal such as *Scholé* makes a substantive contribution to understanding more about experiential teaching and learning. Second, we believe the portrayal of the results as actual journal statements woven together offers an interesting and aesthetic approach that will be accessible to all readers of the journal. Third, the paper is based on reflexivity throughout the semester in assessing the experience and its impact on each of us. Fourth, we hope that this account shows how the research influenced each of us in different ways. Finally, we have structured this paper to embody a sense of the experience and emotions associated with learning. The reactions that some of us had to this experience were similar to the perceptions that Kleinman, Copp, and Henderson (1997) had in teaching qualitative research approaches, but were also different in relation to the focus on a specific project in which we all participated together.

We recognize that some limitations existed to this study. For example, we were required to keep a journal and some resistance may have occurred in that expectation. Further, since the journal was going to be read by others, some censorship may have occurred in describing the experience. Austerlitz (2006) described how the disclosure of feelings in Western culture requires some familiarity, and depends on the relationships among people. We did not know each other as well in the beginning of the semester as at the end. Although we were required to write each week, we admit that the journaling was not done consistently each week. Thus, some emotions may have moderated over time if the journaling was not done regularly. In addition, the assignment did not require us to write specifically about the affect or emotions of our experiences. Some wrote about cognitive issues. However, we all did write about our feelings on a number of occasions during the semester. These limitations may have affected some of the data, but we hope the ethnographic autobiography demonstrated that we were reflexive in examining our attitudes, emotions, and experiences.

We hope the description of how we experienced this content area using an experiential approach over the course of one semester will provide ideas for how qualitative research approaches might be taken in other universities. We recognize that the project probably took more time as well as emotional effort than would have happened with a more standard classroom approach. We also recognize that the outcomes of doing a project such as this one are often uncertain. Nevertheless, from both the student and instructor perspective, we believe this strategy can work effectively. If the class had been larger, perhaps two projects could have been undertaken. Also, doing mixed methods may not be necessary for some projects. We recommend this teaching and learning strategy to others but realize that every experience is different.

The experience of teaching and learning in this doctoral seminar focusing on qualitative research approaches was positive for all of us. The use of a community experiential project required academic as well as emotional labor from each of us. Yet this project, combined with other learning opportunities in the course, offered a way to experience our “selves” in a research project. The long term outcome will be how we, as well as future learners, make sense of the experiences and emotions of doing qualitative research.

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