Awakenings: Ed.D. Students Encounter—and Enact—Qualitative Research for the First Time

I recently taught our doctoral program’s introductory qualitative research class for the first time. Because qualitative research is not widely practiced here, I knew students would come in with little understanding of its practical elements. I designed the course, therefore, around very basic fieldwork practices: observations, fieldnotes, interviews, transcriptions. Because our doctoral program often discourages—and sometimes disparages—qualitative research, I also knew students would have no sense of its contemporary epistemologies: collaboration, reflexivity, positionality, contingency, particularity. So I grounded the course in readings that could move students away from the constrained notions they carried into the class toward much broader sense of epistemological possibilities I hoped they’d carry away. Some found the work challenging, but others experienced awakenings as a result of their encounters with qualitative work. In this panel, four of those students give accounts of their experiences, and of the transformative power they encountered in qualitative research.

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If You Fall In Love With The Challenge, You Are Inspired Every Day

This preliminary autoethnographic account explores common themes emerging from lived experiences of first-year secondary teachers in an urban high school. Using my own first year of teaching as a touchstone, I reflect on the experience of a beginning teacher in a in a low-performing high school who struggles to succeed with diverse students. We both encountered such similar challenges in our first years: classroom management, insufficient teaching materials and supplies, and new—often high stakes—relationships. This presentation weaves my own recollections together with interviews and classroom observations of that beginning teacher. Both of our narratives reinforce the need for strengthening mentoring programs, for developing stronger pre-service teaching experiences, and for providing additional classroom resources. Our shared experiences also raise the possibility of additional support systems that would allow capable teachers to do more than just survive their first year of teaching.

Keywords: Induction, Beginning Teachers, and Case Study

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Reflexivity: One Student’s Adventure

I came into Marshall’s Ed.D. program with a background in mathematics and law. As a student in our required “Introduction to Qualitative Research” course, I got my first taste of what I’d considered the “touchy, feely” side of research. Admittedly, my initial attitude toward qualitative research was nearly hostile. But I consider myself a good student and so, despite my reservations, I determined to do well. Our primary assignment was to explore a particular site of learning. I chose a raid group in the World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game. As a researcher in what had been a familiar setting, I learned how reflexivity could help me to see with fresh eyes. To my surprise, the study also inspired reflexivity in my participants and transformed my ideas about research. In the end, we all learned a little about ourselves and a lot about the meaning of learning.

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Research Another Way: An Autoethnographic Look at an Ed. D. Student’s First Journey through Qualitative Research

In the fall of 2015, I took the introductory doctoral course in qualitative research. My prior knowledge of qualitative research had been limited to the idea that qualitative data could be used to make statistical research more interesting. The course content—which included a range of readings, field activities, and writing exercises—was scaffolded so as to prepare student for each step. At the end of the semester, we could either present our research findings or write a reflection on our experiences as qualitative researchers. This paper combines my course research on Intervention Specialists and Paraprofessionals in the school I began working for this year with my experience of being a budding qualitative researcher. Chronicling this dual experience autoethnographically has helped me to better understand my new school and colleagues, as well as my own personal evolution as a qualitative researcher.

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Why Didn't Anyone Tell Me?: Discovering Qualitative Research at the End of Doctoral Coursework

As a middle school science teacher five years ago, I was awarded the opportunity to travel to the Mediterranean with a deep sea research team. At the time, a professor in my MA program told me it would be a great research opportunity for me. I had no clue what she meant. I was not on the formal research team—what could I research? In my last year of Ed.D. coursework, I took my first qualitative research class. In the processes of learning about observations, fieldnotes, designing and interviews, transcriptions, and the mysteries of coding/indexing, I began to understand the opportunity I’d missed. These skills and the new outlook I gained from qualitative research made me wish I had known about it much earlier. I know about it now, though, and going forward I will not forget the range of opportunities and possibilities that exist in the experiences of others.