

Teaching and learning qualitative methods through the dissertation advising relationship: Perspectives from a professor and a graduate

George W Turner

University of Kansas, USA; Turner Professional Group, USA

Betsy Crane

Widener University, USA

Abstract

Mastery of qualitative research and its methods can be a challenge for doctoral students who often have had more academic course exposure and practical experience with quantitative research. Qualitative courses frequently provide a theoretical preliminary understanding, but it is the rich “on-the-ground” experience of doing research that synthesizes the learning, allowing a student to fully appreciate qualitative research as their own. This article presents the experience of a doctoral advisor and a student in the process of coaching a qualitative dissertation. Individual reflexivity, dialogic meaning making, and meeting notes from the dissertation process comprise the data sources for this inquiry. The instructor’s teaching approach is discussed as well as the student’s knowledge, values, and skills employed during the learning process. Additionally, two ethical dilemmas encountered by the student are examined, as well as use of a newly minted special education PhD as a qualitative research consultant. Technological tools such as Skype and Dropbox were used to bridge the geographical distance between their locations. Both the advisor and student offer insight into the experience, highlighting what worked well for them, lessons learned, and recommendations for future student/instructor dyads. The student finished his dissertation in four semesters, and won an “Outstanding Dissertation” Award, and is now cowriting subsequent journal articles with his dissertation chair. Thus, it is concluded that teaching qualitative research during the dissertation process creates a bridge between graduate course

Corresponding author:

George W Turner, University of Kansas, 1545 Lilac Ln, Twente Hall, Lawrence 66045-3129, USA.

Email: george@turnerprofessionalgroup.com

work and the practical application of qualitative methodology, in order to transition doctoral students to early career PhD-level researchers.

Keywords

Teaching qualitative research, dissertation advising, social work research, faculty–student relationship, academic mentoring, graduate research course

In this paper, we reflect upon the process of teaching and learning qualitative research through the dissertation process, based on the experience of being a doctoral advisor and a graduate student. We engaged in a dissertation coaching relationship, initially through Skype meetings every other week, which became weekly during the data analysis and writing stages of Turner's dissertation (Turner, 2012). Individual reflexivity, dialogic meaning making, and meeting notes from the dissertation process comprise the data sources for this inquiry. The study's results are cogenerative in both content and process, as we applied collaborative inquiry (Harris et al., 2009) to understand the mutual benefits and value of formal coaching, hands on experiential learning, as well as reflective processing. A note about voice: Turner's uses the title, "Dr. Crane" as he did during the dissertation process. Postdissertation he shifted to use of her first name. This was his preference, reflecting perceived power dynamics.

The purpose of Turner's qualitative case study was to explore how adults with mild intellectual disabilities (IDs) live out their social–sexual lives. Adults with IDs are often assumed to be asexual, hypersexual, or incapable of having sexual lives, resulting in a paucity of research-based knowledge. Informed by heuristic inquiry and guided by an emancipatory research paradigm, Turner explored self-reported views, values, and desires of five adults with mild IDs regarding relationships, romance, and sexuality. Data sources included observations and a series of interviews, which gave participants the chance to give voice to their social–sexual experiences. Results demonstrate that adults with ID value a life filled with relational passion and connectedness. Turner finished his dissertation in just two years and won an "Outstanding Dissertation" Award. He and Crane are now co-authoring dissertation-based journal articles, and he has co-presented at a special education (SPED) conference with a dissertation committee member from that discipline.

Graduate level teaching of qualitative research is quite uneven (Drisko, 2008). Thus, teaching and learning qualitative methods during the process of designing and carrying out dissertation research is an important phase of doctoral training, bridging graduate course work and the practical application of qualitative methods. This article presents thoughts and feelings about our process, highlighting what worked well, lessons learned, and suggestions for future student/instructor dyads. As qualitative researchers, we value discovery-oriented, naturalistic observations, and in that light, offer our insider perspectives on teaching and being taught qualitative research.

Literature review

Teaching qualitative research

The social work literature demonstrates clear benefits in conducting qualitative research in a variety of settings, such as program evaluation (Drisko, 2001). Qualitative methods bridge social work practice, research, and education (Denzin, 2002). As Ruckdeschel and Shaw (2002) asserted, practice methodology can be informed by qualitative research. Qualitative research aligns well with the goals and values of social work (Gilgun, 1994; Riessman, 1994). The interest may be partially due to a recognition that “qualitative methods can be especially important tools to understand the problems of vulnerable people and to explore solutions for their amelioration” (Benton et al., 2011: 233).

However, there is limited literature on teaching qualitative research (Waite, 2014), despite the fact that qualitative articles are being published in social work journals (Shek et al., 2005). Perhaps as a strategy seeking to legitimize our profession (Sowers and Dulmos, 2009), there remains a systemic bias toward quantitative research methods by academics. Schools and courses still focus primarily on quantitative methods (Gilgun and Abrams, 2002) with often less than adequate preparation of graduate students to do qualitative research (Drisko, 2008). Staller (2012) refers to this “epistemological preference” as the “common currency of a dominant discourse” (397). These factors have contributed to the image of qualitative research being what Drisko (2008) refers to as a “second class citizen” (95), despite the recommendation by the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Educations’ Guidelines for Quality in Social Work Programs (2003) that curriculum include both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This begs the question, “Are we adequately preparing students to fill this interest by scholarly publications to balance the historically quantitative research focus?”

Benton et al. (2011) note that “the social work literature does not offer much guidance in best practices for teaching qualitative methods, especially at the doctoral level” (233). Their literature review identified just four articles (Brun, 1997; Clute, 2005; Franklin, 1996; O’Connor, 2001) discussing qualitative research at the doctoral level. Learning about qualitative research through course work should be a gateway to a successful dissertation journey using these methods. Yet, as Waite (2014) noted, “teaching and learning are always unfinished” (267). It makes sense that the *on-the-ground* effort of carrying out dissertation research using qualitative methods enriches overall comprehension of the concepts through experiential learning.

Dissertation advisors as mentors

With doctoral candidates often entering the dissertation process with less than adequate preparation in qualitative research, dissertation advisors often serve as qualitative methods instructors. Advising a doctoral candidate is a role already

fraught with paradoxes. The advisor is a quality control supervisor, tasked by the university and disciplinary colleagues with setting boundaries for what is a *good enough* dissertation to pass muster. At that same time, if students are to succeed, advisors need to use coaching and mentoring skills to help apprentice researchers gain the tools and confidence needed to persevere, especially when inevitable *dragons* (Heinrich, 2000) appear in the form of challenges in their personal life and/or the research itself.

Teaching as part of the dissertation advising process is sequential, in that the student's strengths and weaknesses related to various aspects of planning and implementing qualitative research become clear as the process evolves. Students may have gotten very strong training in epistemologies and are thus able to make a strong argument for a constructivist study; however, they may stumble when trying to envision how a thematic coding process actually works.

As Drisko (2008) and others call for a stronger commitment to the teaching of qualitative research, it is crucial to look at how learning from courses is transferred to practice. It is clear that mentoring enhances the student's learning of qualitative research (Shelby, 2000). The dissertation process can also help boost their self-concept as a qualitative researcher. Our experience with this process is presented as a possible roadmap for replication and enhancement.

Instructor's teaching approach: Crane

Most of our PhD students are community-based practitioners who work full time; there are no funded research assistantships. Thus, the doctoral students choose their own research topics rather than being part of a professor's research team. Students often commute in for classes, which are typically taught in a blended format, with weekend classes and online assignments. Thus, dissertation advisement often takes place via video calls. Many students, like George, are seeking an advanced degree at midlife. I connect easily to their situation, as I myself came back to the academy in midlife after years of working in the community, earning my PhD at 50 and entering the professorship thereafter. I understand the challenges of accommodating to academic culture, which is often experienced by students such as George who have held leadership positions in nonprofit or government organizations, but find the academy to be a foreign culture (Crane, O'Hern, & Lawler, 2010). As a self-identified practitioner and academic, or *pracademic* (Volpe & Chandler, 2007), I enjoy and appreciate these teacher–student relationships.

With any new advisee, I assess readiness related to understanding the methods they choose to use, as well as their ability to present an argument for the importance and relevance of their topic. Since just one of the four research courses our students are required to take is a qualitative methods class, I find most can envision a qualitative study, but often lack concrete skills needed to carry one out. Students also often bring, albeit unconsciously, lingering positivist epistemological assumptions carried over from previous research training (Staller, 2012).

As a dissertation advisor I am aware of being a teacher, supervisor, critic, and mentor. As in my teaching of graduate classes, I use adult education principles, i.e. andragogy (Knowles, 1990) and empowerment-oriented approaches in my advisement. I also use qualitative research skills to observe the behaviors and interactions of my advisees, who are encouraged to tell their own stories about their dissertation journey and reflect on their day-to-day experiences. I use a metaphor to explain to doctoral candidates how I see my role, which is that of a mountain climbing guide. While I have already climbed my own mountain—doing a dissertation at midlife while working full time and raising teenage children—this will be their mountain to climb. However, I will be at their side, sharing tools and offering encouragement as needed. If I see them starting to take off on a wrong fork in the trail, I will pull them back, helping to keep focus on the prize, the top of the mountain, the successful dissertation, and the Ph.D.

Student's learning approach: Turner

I came into dissertation research as a nontraditional student. I am a licensed clinical social worker with 20 plus years in the social service field. During my doctoral studies, I was employed full time in private practice as a psychotherapist and was doing adjunct teaching. I was focused on completing the program and brought the following strengths to the table: motivation to receive the degree, organization, strong self-advocacy and leadership skills, and passion about my research topic.

Being strongly motivated to complete the program, I strategically approached the dissertation with guiding principles that helped me stay on track. I was open to the learning opportunities presented in feedback from my chair and committee. This meant that I tactically chose which issues were worth pushing back on. I tried to graciously receive feedback, quickly implement suggestions, and judiciously select issues that I wanted to engage in debate over. I focused on a committee member's mantra that my research was but one brick in the wall of research, and that I would have time after the dissertation was complete to tackle the larger picture. I tried to keep naïve ambition in check and zero in on the immediate target, which for me was to produce a meaningful dissertation in just the four semesters required for dissertation registration.

Organizational aptitude and skills were paramount in working with my advisor. I took responsibility for organizing advising meetings, setting the agenda, providing feedback on my progress, and informing my chair of my needs. I kept in mind that I was but one of her students and while I was deeply entrenched in my work I couldn't assume that my chair recalled our latest edits or changes in direction. I noted every move to keep her feedback timely and relevant. My goal was to make her reentry into my dissertation as seamless as possible, providing her step-by-step notations on the direction that I was seeking.

I am no wallflower and came to the process with experience advocating for my own interests. Having worked in social services in many leadership roles I was adept at team management and group dynamics. You can't be successful in

social services and not know how to work a room. Also, while I welcomed the expertise of my chair and committee and their guidance, I also took my responsibility to shepherd this research into a quality dissertation very seriously.

Finally, I was passionate about the topic. I had always heard that you needed to pick a topic that you wouldn't tire of, because a dissertation requires a huge devotion of time, and often it is the passion for the topic that keeps a student from throwing in the towel. I had that fire in my belly for this topic. I started in social services as a direct care staff for adults with ID where I was tapped to lead agency staff trainings on sexuality awareness. It may be that I saw myself and how my own sexuality often felt marginalized in the stories of my clients. It was their untold stories that intrigued me. The clients taught me to listen, to observe, and to question. During daily 90 minute van drives to their homes from the workshop, pieces of their stories were revealed to me. They amazed me with their desire for social and relationship interactions, i.e. flirtatious banter, probing sex inquiries, hand-holding, and eye gazing, along with copious amounts of misinformation, and socially inappropriate behavior. My passion was born in observing a social injustice; these clients were not truly seen. I was hired to support independent living, defined by the agency as tasks such as budgeting and meal preparation. But there was no contest; my clients valued hooking up over housekeeping. I practice from a professional position that values the *immate erotic orientation* of all individuals, including adults with ID. As a certified sex therapist I advocate for healthy sexuality for all of my clients. These are not only assumptions, but strongly held values that were the impetus for my dissertation research.

What worked well

Relationship evolution

Crane. We had not previously had a teacher–student relationship, as George had completed the classes I taught before I joined the faculty. He lived in the Midwest, and I had met him at a conference. When we started working together in a dissertation advising relationship, I quickly noted his large personality, and his passion for his topic, that of helping adults with ID to have a voice related to their social/sexual lives. It was one in which I too had a very strong interest in that I have a relative who is an adult with ID and had recently married. I also noted that George's writing was clear and thorough, if not too thorough. There was a tendency I have often seen when students begin a dissertation proposal, i.e. throwing everything they read and think into the proposal. I sometimes played the role of a wrangler, reining in a galloping horse, and helping him see that his initial idea for the dissertation was actually two research studies.

Also immediately apparent were his strengths in terms of organizational skills and motivation. We met by video call initially twice a month, then once a week, as he got closer to completion. Regular advisor/advisee meetings are one of the

promising practices noted by the Council of Graduate Schools PhD Completion Project (2008). Another is to have a shared timeline for expected work completion. Typically he shared work for me to review prior to our meeting via a cloud-based file storage system, Dropbox. He emailed an agenda, which he used to facilitate our meeting. The responsibility for the process was with him. He was using me as a consultant to help him carry out his research. In addition to covering items on my agenda, I typically started my part of the call by asking him how he was doing. As his mentor, it helped me to hear from him about life successes or challenges, as well as how he was feeling about the dissertation process. I could then provide appropriate support, feedback, or validation, and we could make any needed modifications to the timeline.

Turner. I was at a unique crossroads in my academic program; the professors from whom I had taken classes had largely retired and I had no classroom experience with the faculty available to be a dissertation chair. Therefore, I strategically selected Dr. Crane due to her position at the time as program director. I believed that her reputation as a leader in our field would serve me well for future references. Prior to the official selection process, I floated the idea of being my chair by her at a professional conference that we both were attending and then followed up the meeting with emails to introduce her to my research ideas.

I was very aware of the power dynamics. Defining moments that heralded a transition to our relationship included me accepting Dr. Crane's Facebook request after I graduated. I had sat on that for approximately six months, not wanting to blur the lines or sully her view of me with any random unfiltered social media ramblings. I also noted when she instructed me to "just call her Betsy" rather than the formal "Dr. Crane" that had been my protocol for our tenure as graduate student and dissertation chair.

Riding on the dissertation committee's praise after my defense and the encouragement to publish, I approached Dr. Crane after graduation to suggest that we co-author articles based on the dissertation. Feeling like there was more to glean from this mentorship, this seemed to be a natural progression. Entering into the academic job market, I knew that I needed to bolster my CV with publications, thus I took the lead to research appropriate journal outlets, pitching ideas to her. This paper is one of those pitches. The apprentice and mentor were now a qualitative research team. Reflecting on my journey with her has given me a new lens in which to view qualitative research and adds to my professional development as a junior qualitative researcher.

What did you appreciate about the other?

Crane. From the start I have valued George's self-motivation, including his ability to take and use feedback and keep going. At the same time he was very clear about what was most important to him about the research, and was able to argue well for his perspective, including using the literature very well in his proposal. He is a

natural qualitative researcher, in that his writing style is lively and creative, as well as clear and scholarly.

George's willingness to be transparent about where he was at with the dissertation, and when he got stuck was also really helpful. I have seen some students become discouraged, shut down, have writer's block, and just disappear for awhile. With George there was never a question as to whether he would show up for our scheduled meetings and be willing to talk about what was hard.

Turner. I valued Dr. Crane's "eagle editing eye." She had a gift for zeroing in like a newspaper copy editor on grammar and formatting, as well as streamlining through the clutter of idea roadblocks that often litter the dissertation process. She went above and beyond what my peers reported other chairs typically did. This additional attention was not lost on me. I appreciated what felt like another level of intensive tutoring, where a master academic was passing down the craft of scholarly writing.

Dr. Crane also seemed genuinely interested in my topic. I never got the impression that this was just a job or I was just one more thing on her "to do" list. She shared my excitement as we engaged in academic discourse, focusing my energy into appropriate places in the writing process. Articulating my position allowed me to situate myself as a qualitative researcher. Additionally, she took her role as an advocate seriously, picking dissertation committee members who would contribute to my research, and presenting on my behalf when there was an IRB challenge.

Dr. Crane was also accessible and timely. She was able to ramp up her feedback as we narrowed in on approaching deadlines. Furthermore, I was allowed to take the lead. Dr. Crane did not become an obstacle in my progress. She clearly enjoyed her role as mentor, cheerleader, and coach.

Ethical dilemmas encountered

On-the-ground challenges provide unique learning opportunities in the mastery of qualitative research methods. Drisko (2008) noted, "issues of engagement, relationship building, ongoing interaction, and termination are much more complex in research that usually centers on the professional use of self to gather information and to systemically analyze it" (96). He challenges social work curricula to incorporate ethical challenges unique to qualitative researchers. Turner encountered some of these situational trials that became teaching and learning opportunities during the advising relationship and that were key to continued progress on the dissertation.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Turner encountered his first on-the-ground ethics lesson during the IRB review process. As a social worker, he was aware of institutional bias and the use of the deficit model. However, the IRB process, a vital step in carrying out ethical

research, proved to be taxing and laborious, testing Turner's patience as well as his values and principles as a social worker. This ethical challenge will be presented from his perspective.

First, because I was researching a vulnerable population, i.e. adults with ID, the proposed protocol required Full IRB Committee Review. Based on initial feedback I got the impression that IRB committee members were not well versed on the range of abilities of adults with ID and seemed to have a paternalistic view of this population in terms of their ability to consent to participate in a study. Given that I live at a distance from campus, I attended the meeting by speakerphone, while Dr. Crane participated in person. Concerns expressed seemed to me to overstep prudent ethical and safety issues. One IRB member wanted to have referring agency staff vouch for the participants' diagnostic "intelligence" category. I explained that the disability field has moved away from only measuring cognitive abilities and limiting labels such as "mild mental retardation" to also include adaptive functioning. Another concern raised was whether I would allow parents or staff to attend the interviews. This issue simply would not have been a question if my proposed participants did not have IDs. A part of the criteria for the study was that participants be their own legal guardians and have a diagnosis of mild mental retardation. These factors were specifically chosen because they would not strip participants of their right to privacy nor their capacity to consent and understand. Despite this some IRB committee members remained concerned.

This may fall under the category of "illegitimate questions" (202) according to Guba and Lincoln (2005) meaning "questions that have no meaning because the frames of reference are those for which they were never intended" (202). Due to the institutional privileging of epistemology favoring the medical model, the questioning may be shielded by "not knowing what you don't know" or may be overtly condescending to unfamiliar alternate ways of knowing, discipline values, or research and practice approaches. All this controversy was about whether adults with ID, who have their own legal rights to consent to medications and other aspects of their lives, would have the ability to consent to be interviewed about their sexuality.

Booth and Booth (1996) caution researchers (and their IRBs) from using a deficit model that views participants as broken or limited, because it serves to disregard and dismiss adults with ID from a "participatory role in narrative research in ways that mirror their exclusion from the wider society" (67). Shakespeare (2006) takes a stronger stance, stating that the difficulty of disability and sexuality is not due to person's disabilities but rather societal and institutional erected barriers.

There was a hint of this deficit model mentality during the Board's discussion of their other concern—my proposal to videotape the interviews. Despite my sharing that, as Speer and Hutchby (2003) have noted, people forget about a video camera's presence and focus on the interaction, and that videotaping of client sessions is a common tool used in my own therapy training, the board resisted based on the point that these would be adults with ID. Also, the board was adamant that there

was little benefit to justify the video taping of the interviews. The implication was that any gain would be insignificant as compared to the potential risks. However, “nothing is trivial to qualitative researchers” (Biklen & Mosley, 1988: 160) and I am still adamant that there would have been a great benefit to reviewing and coding participant body language.

My first thoughts were, “Why are we even debating this? This seems silly!” Audiotaped interviews are research relics that clearly cannot compete with video recording. As a novice researcher, I was shocked that the benefits were not taken for granted and apparent. My own ageism surfaced at this point as I felt stonewalled by the old guard of research advocating for black and white TV despite having color TV available. I predict that this debate will seem archaic as we continue to incorporate newer forms of communication such as Skype and texting into our data collection methods.

My frustration with the process was extremely high. Since I was on speakerphone, it was difficult to hear, I missed the board members’ cross conversation, the opportunity to read body language, as well the ability to give a face to the research. My frustration was palpable; I only could provide terse responses. I should have personally attended, given the subject matter and lack of board expertise on adults with ID. Naïvely I had overestimated the audience.

Fortunately Dr. Crane attended to act as my proxy and advocate for the research. I am certain that her composed tone helped the board to approve the study. I agreed to the changes they required regarding the recording technique. No other changes were needed.

As this example typifies, systemic bias is often very subtle. Furthermore, qualitative research is often subject to what Staller (2012) refers to as “misplaced critiques” (396). The response to this study from the IRB most likely came from a place of *good intention*. It operated under the umbrella of “duty to protect.” Furthermore, there was quality on-the-ground learning that took place experientially that I could not have been exposed to via a classroom discussion of IRB protocols and challenges. This experience provided a boost of passion to my work.

Participant was former neighbor

Another on-the-ground ethics lesson took place when I met a participant, Lionel (pseudonym), who as it turned out, was a former neighbor of mine. As a youth, Lionel grew up on my block. I frequently saw him walking his dog and I had occasionally employed him for yard work. Lionel was gregarious and knew all the neighbors by name.

As a youth, Lionel went by the name Marcus (also a pseudonym), which is evidently his middle name. He dropped Marcus when he transitioned into his own apartment. So it was a shock when I met a man named “Lionel” on the day of home visits and introductions, whom an agency had referred to participate in the project, and I recognized “Marcus.” Lionel came running up to my vehicle with a big grin, shouting, “Hey George!” After conferring with my research assistant, we

decided to continue with the home visit and then seek guidance from my dissertation chair, who advised me that prior acquaintance would not nullify his participation. Lionel's adoptive mom still lives down the street from me. Additionally, Lionel was the only participant of color and he offered a rich reflection of youth culture, specifically the importance of social networking and technology and how people with ID can also utilize these tools to develop and nurture relationships.

These are prime examples of the rich *postcourse work* learning that happens during the dissertation process that is not typically discussed in a textbook nor can they be realistically expected to be addressed in a course. They are also prime examples of the value of the research supervisor/dissertation advisor relationship.

Using technology

Technology was used to facilitate the learning process. A video chat tool, Skype, was utilized for meetings to bridge the geographic distance. This allowed for more intimate meetings than would have been the case with phone calls, enriching the learning through a more person-centered approach. Dropbox, a cloud-based storage system was used to upload timely changes to our document. Often a dissertation is time sensitive to a variety of deadlines. This tool helps to maximize turnaround.

There are a variety of technology tools available with many university online teaching platforms. We suggest contacting your IT person to see what products they may have to help enhance the learning process. For example, a product called, VoiceThread, allows asynchronous video responses. A mentor could pose a question to a group of dissertating students allowing them to respond via video. These could be archived for future students. The program also allows for document uploads. In addition, it could be used as a video diary for field notes, allowing a mentor to check in on doctoral students and even provide feedback about the process.

Qualitative research consultant

While it is not unusual for students doing quantitative research to hire a statistics consultant, this is less commonly done for qualitative projects. Turner became aware of a recent graduate, a special education teacher at a nearby university whose qualitative research had also involved adults with ID. They met for some initial networking. About a year later as Turner began his dissertation process, he hired the SPED teacher as a research consultant on qualitative methodology. Turner and the consultant met weekly during the proposal-writing stage, and then more frequently as Turner prepared to analyze the data he had gathered and transcribed. The consultant supported and guided Turner through his struggles and *aha* moments. Her approach was to share her research experiences and professional insights, particularly as they related to the methodology and data analysis. Other topics included procedural issues in conducting qualitative research, including research with vulnerable participants, developing the codebook, and discussing findings.

The consultant augmented the role of the dissertation chair in that Turner was able to process and walk through his chair's critiques and feedback with her. Additionally, the consultant helped him to flush out new ideas to then discuss with Turner's chair. The consultant's expertise in SPED augmented Dr. Crane's limited knowledge of the disability field. A traditional mentoring model with one's dissertation chair and committee is limited by the committee's time and area of expertise, in this case, disabilities. Hiring a qualitative research consultant provided Turner with access to someone with qualitative experience, and expanded the learning given her content expertise, as in this case as a disability practitioner.

Lessons learned

It is clear that learning qualitative research methods was enhanced through the dissertation mentoring process. On-the-ground experience solidified coursework lessons, highlighted new understandings, and exposed further areas of learning. We identified 10 lessons gleaned from Turner's experience, including:

1. *Honor the rich and thick in your writing:* Writing up qualitative findings is to some degree an art form as it attempts to present to readers the lived experience of participants. All too often novice qualitative researchers fall back on previous academic training and sound too removed. I avoided this pitfall; my writing moved one committee member to share, "I never laughed so much or cried so hard in reading a dissertation."
2. *Become intimate with the data:* I did not use a qualitative software program; rather, I opted to immerse myself in the data old school, with data on color-coded sheets of paper arranged on my living room floor. I felt that this tactile organization helped me understand the data, providing a more intimate opportunity for meaning making. At the same time it often felt overwhelming, as if someone had dumped seemingly "unrelated" groupings such as my kitchen junk drawer, my mom's recipe books, and an old tool box onto the kitchen table and said, "make sense of it all!" Being open to new groupings allowed me to see that I might have a relationship between items across original groupings. For example, a blue deck of cards from the junk drawer, a blueberry pancake recipe from Mom's recipe books, and blue painters tape from the tool box could now be seen as having meaning in the common theme of "blue."
3. *Find qualitative allies:* I feel that Dr. Crane's in-person advocacy before the IRB board probably saved my research; qualitative research often demands informed allies.
4. *Be your own qualitative cheerleader:* And, while it is important to have an advisor who will go to bat for you, as a qualitative researcher you need to be prepared to champion your work and not assume that a written proposal can stand on its own.

5. *Know your committee members*: Your committee members might be chosen for their topic expertise; however, they should also be at least open to and appreciative of qualitative research.
6. *Qualitative research can push buttons*: Qualitative research can often be cutting edge exploring uncharted areas. Students need to be able to set and hold boundaries around their research plan and defend as needed. At the dissertation defense, a reader, a disability expert who both of us admire, advised rethinking the focus on sexual pleasure to look at safer topics such as: sexual abuse and pregnancy prevention. I respectfully disagreed, providing rationale for my research focus on pleasure, which my committee supported.
7. *Locate a "Critical Friend"*: I had a peer doctoral student to act as a research assistant during home visits and interviews, in part because as a male interviewing individuals about their sexuality, I believed it would be best to have a female present. But what she also provided was an invaluable extra set of eyes. She was able to see things like participant fatigue when I became too narrowly focused on the interview. A critical friend has been defined as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend" (Costa & Kallick, 1993: 49).
8. *Qualitative research allows for surprises*: Despite pilot testing and seemingly airtight procedures, I had to accommodate agency staffing changes, transportation glitches, and participant life events.
9. *Remove the shackles of quantitative epistemology*: I was extremely anxious upon meeting a prior neighbor during the research. Feeling that I had violated some research covenant, I sought consultation with my chair to realize that I was living in the shadow of my prior training in quantitative research. It was in the field that I was able to now value the nuances of qualitative research, owning the distinct methodological value and theoretical approaches afforded to me by qualitative research.
10. *Meaning making is a process*: Hiring a consultant allowed me to think out loud, marinate on the data, and search beyond the surface.

Recommendations for future student/advisors dyads

Through this process, we observed eight takeaway lessons. We believe that these observations may enhance the learning process for future teaching-learning dyads.

For students

1. *Choose a qualitative master*: A seasoned qualitative researcher can be an invaluable guide through potential qualitative research hazards. Staller (2012)

recommends that one needs to take a protective stance by being cognizant of what Steinmetz (2005a) labeled the “epistemological unconsciousness” (109). Staller (2012) further describes this as objectivist, privileged research, and the entrenched nature within university culture, warning that overlooking this fact is a rookie qualitative researcher’s mistake.

2. *Think long term*: Choosing a dissertation advisor with strong qualitative research expertise can be an investment beyond your dissertation. Think long term, i.e. publishing together, references, contacts, etc.
3. *Apprentice model*: Approach your experience as an intensive research apprenticeship, honing your craft. Use your mentor as a master craftsperson who can bridge your journey in becoming a junior researcher.
4. *Field notes*: Keep an online cloud-based research journal and data collection field notes that your advisor can review to provide useful commentary.
5. *Sit at the feet of giants*: Cultivate opportunities to reap sage knowledge from your advisor. In an effort to address Drisko’s (1997) concern that “thorough and detailed evaluative criteria for qualitative research are rare in social work” (186), one idea might be to see if your advisor is a blind reviewer for any journals and ask to co-review journal articles.

For advisors

1. *Assess for qualitative challenges*: With students, evaluate their existing knowledge and skills in qualitative methods, so areas for coaching are identified, e.g. epistemologies, sampling, qualitative frameworks, coding and analysis, representation of findings.
2. *Regularly scheduled meetings*: Structure can help students who get stuck. The newfound freedom from coursework can be overwhelming for some students. Plan to discuss this with students and game plan how to best support this transition.
3. *Role flexibility*: Notating that the relationship evolves is important, as students variously need support, critiques, boundaries, and expert advice.

Conclusions

As a new researcher, Turner needed to continue cultivating his scholarly identity. Engagement with Crane provided him opportunities to grow his abilities in scholarly inquiry and academic discourse. This research socialization fed into an incremental piecing together of a new identity as a qualitative researcher, allowing it to take root.

How does one become a “possessor of knowledge, a knower”? (Seymour, 2006: 463). According to Seymour (2006), “It is the doing that animates the knowing” (461). By engaging with qualitative research we are changed (Seymour, 2006) in a

way that is richly different than merely reading about it. By immersing himself into qualitative research through his dissertation, Turner built a personal relationship with this methodology. It ignited a more thorough understanding and appreciation of the topic. It provoked him to connect theory and practice and most importantly its relevance to him as a researcher. By co-engaging with his dissertation chair who shared a passion for his topic, and his methods, he was able to persevere, and ultimately produce useful new knowledge. Doing the reflections needed for this article has been mutually valuable. Qualitative research, by design, allows for the interpreted construction of social reality. We offer our thinking here for readers who may use the article to stimulate a similar conversation on this topic with their advisees or advisor.

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