

11-10-2014

## Out of Our Comfort Zones: Reflections about Teaching Qualitative Research at a Distance

Cheyl A. Hunter

*University of North Dakota*, Cheryl.hunter@email.und.edu

Debora Hinderliter Ortloff

*Finger Lakes Community College*, E-debora.ortloff@ficc.edu

Rachelle Winkle-Wagner

*University of Wisconsin*, winklewagner@wisc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended APA Citation

Hunter, C. A., Ortloff, D. H., & Winkle-Wagner, R. (2014). Out of Our Comfort Zones: Reflections about Teaching Qualitative Research at a Distance. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(45), 1-24. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss45/3>

This Teaching and Learning is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



## Out of Our Comfort Zones: Reflections about Teaching Qualitative Research at a Distance

### Abstract

How does an increase in distance technology alter the teaching of qualitative research? This article uses a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (McKinney, 2007) framework in which each author collected data in the form of personal narrative essays about teaching qualitative research from a distance, course products, teaching evaluations, and student comments. Individually we created a narrative reflection on the teaching and learning of qualitative methodology; particularly comparing our individual experiences with both distance and in-person teaching formats. Through these reflective essays, we provide ideas about our teaching of qualitative research via distance technology as a conceptual conversation about the nature of teaching qualitative research in non-face-to-face settings within schools of education. Looking across the essays we found that teaching qualitative methodology is rooted in relational ideas that may be difficult in a distance setting. We each individually struggled with the loss of time for learning new technology or traveling over a distance, which may have compromised the integrity of our other faculty job requirements. One common recommendation was that there be some level of face-to-face interaction, even over distance technologies, as a way to facilitate relational concepts in qualitative teaching.

### Keywords

Reflection, Teaching Qualitative Research, Distance Education, Teaching and Learning

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).



## **Out of Our Comfort Zones: Reflections about Teaching Qualitative Research at a Distance**

Cheryl A. Hunter

University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA

Debora Hinderliter Ortloff

Finger Lakes Community College, Canandaigua, New York, USA

Rachelle Winkle-Wagner

University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

---

*How does an increase in distance technology alter the teaching of qualitative research? This article uses a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (McKinney, 2007) framework in which each author collected data in the form of personal narrative essays about teaching qualitative research from a distance, course products, teaching evaluations, and student comments. Individually we created a narrative reflection on the teaching and learning of qualitative methodology; particularly comparing our individual experiences with both distance and in-person teaching formats. Through these reflective essays, we provide ideas about our teaching of qualitative research via distance technology as a conceptual conversation about the nature of teaching qualitative research in non-face-to-face settings within schools of education. Looking across the essays we found that teaching qualitative methodology is rooted in relational ideas that may be difficult in a distance setting. We each individually struggled with the loss of time for learning new technology or traveling over a distance, which may have compromised the integrity of our other faculty job requirements. One common recommendation was that there be some level of face-to-face interaction, even over distance technologies, as a way to facilitate relational concepts in qualitative teaching. Keywords: Reflection, Teaching Qualitative Research, Distance Education, Teaching and Learning*

---

Teaching qualitative research means spending time building the essential skills of a qualitative researcher such as good observation, good interviewing, and good communication skills. These skills are essential to elicit meaningful data to use for subsequent analysis. The face-to-face course delivery method, with its high level of personal interaction and use of role modeling, seems essential to both learning and practicing these skills. Further, qualitative research emerged as a means of including voices and many qualitative research traditions rely on participation in the community and attention to power relations (Carspecken, 1996; Foley, 2002), highly subjective and relational realms. The face-to-face teaching model clearly allows for building high levels of personal interaction and attention to participation as students learn qualitative skills. However, instructional delivery methods are quickly changing to fill a need for distance students (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Carnevale, 2005; Kaya, 2010). More and more universities are beginning to offer master's and doctoral level courses online, or using hybrid models incorporating other distance education media (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Carnevale, 2005). By distance, we mean courses that in some way are not held on the main physical campus of the university (e.g., completely on-line, partially on-line, teleconferencing, meeting at satellite locations). This may mean that these courses are at an

off-campus site and are taught in an intensive format, employ online technology, or a combination of these. One of the primary rationales for increased distance offerings is to provide greater access to coursework for a broader population of students (Anderson, 2001; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). The purpose of these reflective essays was to explore what these changes in course delivery meant to our teaching of qualitative methodology in our particular contexts.

Distance course offerings are increasing nationally. For example, the year 2009 saw the largest increase in online course offerings in higher education since the medium became regularly used (Kaya, 2010). The growth in online research courses is certainly paired with the growth in for-profit universities' foray into doctoral level work (e.g., Capella; Walden). However, many universities, especially regional schools, which are tasked with a mission to serve large areas, have been moving towards increasing their online presence. Whereas higher education writ large is growing at an annual rate of two percent, online education enrollment is increasing at an average annual rate of 21 percent (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Competition with online, usually for-profit schools has encouraged some programs to "go online" in order to attract students.

For professors of educational research, particularly qualitative research, with its deeply interpersonal skill set, this trend emerges as daunting or potentially even antithetical to the field. Indeed, as a foundation to our work in this paper, we argue that teaching qualitative research methods *should not* fundamentally differ by format because the epistemological (way of knowing) and ontological (body of knowledge) suppositions of qualitative research require a format that is interactive, engaging, and reflective. Thus, each of us believes that both traditional and distance teaching must teach using interactive, engaging, and reflective methods. However, we had different preconceptions about distance education initially (one of us was skeptical, one of us was a little hopeful, and one of us was interested in how distance education could create access).

We posed the following questions to guide our reflections and analysis:

- 1) In what ways do experienced professors of qualitative inquiry adapt to teaching qualitative research using new distance education media?
- 2) Do these adaptations to distance education media come with a shift in our own philosophies of education?
- 3) What are the implications for course integrity/field integrity as we move toward a very different means of instruction delivery?

As three professors who teach qualitative research, both as formal courses and through dissertation mentorship, we began asking ourselves these questions as we struggled with transforming our own instructional practice. We also looked to alternative means to explore our own research practice; the Scholarship on Teaching and Learning was a natural fit. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a more recent body of literature and methods, which build on faculty development, action-research, classroom and program assessment, reflective practice research, and educational research. SoTL literature identifies scholars in a wide range of disciplines who conduct research on teaching practice within and between disciplines. SoTL also draws upon specific research methods, such as reflection and analysis, content analysis of text, and secondary analysis of existing data (Deale, 2010; Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007; Machtmes et al., 2009).

Drawing from SoTL methods, we began to more formally investigate our teaching processes by exploring both the existing literature and our reflections on the distance education teaching process that we were experiencing. This paper is intended as a framework for professional discussion about teaching qualitative research specifically, but broadly, we

are interested in how educational research might shift within a distance education environment. The conclusion of our reflective essays on teaching and learning suggests that teaching qualitative methodology is rooted in relational ideas that may be difficult in a distance setting. Some level of face-to-face interaction, even over distance technologies, might offer a way to facilitate relational concepts in qualitative teaching.

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework for Reflections**

One of the rationales offered for the importance of distance education is to provide access to populations who would not otherwise be able to gain access to this coursework. As we reviewed the extant literature, we included some of the literature on access to college as a way to place the topic of teaching and learning in distance venues within this conversation on access. We also reviewed literature on online or distance pedagogy and scholarship on the teaching of qualitative methods.

#### **Access to Higher Education**

Access to higher education has been traditionally separated into three areas (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013):

- 1) academic preparation with a focus on how students prepare for college coursework in primary and secondary education;
- 2) college choice with an emphasis on the decisions that students make whether to attend college and/or which institution to attend;
- 3) and college affordability which highlights students' financial backgrounds and the way that they gain financial access to college through loans, grants, scholarships, or part- or full-time employment.

We briefly examine each of these areas of research on college access with an eye towards the comparison between in-person and distance education in higher education.

The academic preparation literature is largely concerned with how students prepare for college coursework in primary or secondary schooling (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). This literature includes an exploration of issues such as: the role of families in shaping students' engagement in academics (Lareau, 2003); or the influence of schools in tracking students toward particular academic goals or preparing students in different ways (e.g., vocational versus college preparatory tracks) (Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). The empirical studies mentioned here refer to studies that present both quantitative and qualitative data. Generally absent from these empirical investigations into academic preparation are explorations of how students may need to prepare differently for college coursework that is offered in the classroom versus college coursework that is offered online or via combined models (e.g., partially online, partially in the classroom, or offerings on weekends or at night). Part of the reason for this absence is that so little is understood about how course offerings really differ (i.e., how syllabi or objectives might differ among different kinds of course offerings).

The college choice literature traditionally has assumed that students' decisions about whether and where to attend college are rational choices about whether the benefits of earning a college degree such as upward social mobility (e.g., the ability to acquire higher status and higher paying jobs) or higher income levels outweigh the costs (e.g., the actual cost of tuition, the cost of time away from full-time employment, etc.; DesJardins & Toutkoushian, 2005; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 2001). Subsequent

studies of the college choice process have started to highlight cultural influences (Kane, 2006; Paulsen, 2001) or social influences such as relationships with family, peers, or faculty and staff on college campuses (Perna & Titus, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). For example, students' decisions about college going are not simply about weighing costs and benefits, according to Valadez's (2008) ethnographic research with high-achieving Mexican immigrant students. In Valadez's study, the students attempted to negotiate structural issues such as finances and geography (e.g., a desire to stay close to home) with familial issues (e.g., students' roles in the family, desire to give back to family, lack of support or understanding from family; see also Freeman, 1999).

The growth of online coursework and degree programs has shifted the discussion about higher education access. Contemplating the college choice decision-making process relative to distance coursework or online degree programs may shift the way that choice is conceptualized. We are concerned with the question as to *what* students are gaining access. That is, as coursework trends toward being offered online in more degree programs, how does this change what students are accessing? Relatively little is known about the differences in how courses are structured when they are offered in-person versus being offered via distance (i.e., completely online) or as hybrid (i.e., combinations between in-person, online, or alternative times such as evenings/weekends) courses. This could alter the way students conceive their options. Even less is known about how this might shift conceptions of access and college choice more generally.

Finally, related to college access, the college affordability line of scholarship primarily centers on the way that students do or do not overcome financial barriers in gaining access to colleges and universities. According to a growing body of empirical research, financial aid (e.g., loans, grants, scholarship, etc.) is one of the most important factors in determining whether a student is able to attend college, and ultimately, whether the student completes his or her degree (Perna, 2006; De La Rosa, 2006; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Access to college may shift with the introduction of online or distance coursework, even though there are serious concerns about the quality of online education and there is little empirical research to ascertain the quality of these courses (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). That is, there are serious questions as to *what* students might be given access to within online education.

We draw from higher education literature to orient our understanding of larger questions of access and quality and how those might impact our interest in the differences between qualitative methodologies taught via traditional versus distance education. While the higher education literature asserts that students may need to prepare differently for online formats, we will argue that there is most likely no difference in how students may need to prepare for coursework offered in these mediums. We argue that teaching qualitative research methods *should not* fundamentally differ by format because the epistemological and ontological suppositions of qualitative research require a format that uses a teaching pedagogy that is interactive, engaging, and reflective. But, we each individually question whether it is possible to maintain the foundations of qualitative methodology in particular distance formats.

### **Online and Distance Pedagogy**

As outlined in the above section, creating increased access to higher education has been the primary motivator behind the move towards alternative modes of delivery. Distance education, as such, has a long history (Huntley & Mather, 1999), beginning with correspondence courses that used the postal service. The United States military in particular created a market for early distance education courses. But with the proliferation of the

Internet and the development of learning management systems, distance education, whether in the form of online education, off-campus education, or hybrid models has become a common feature at most universities (Wooldridge, 2005). Indeed Carnevale (2005) reported that according to the findings of a national survey, distance education, primarily through online or hybrid models, is the fastest growing sector for student enrollment at the post-secondary level. As we began this investigation into our own distance education teaching, we investigated what existing scholarship said about pedagogy and practice within this paradigm. Three key factors emerged as relevant: theoretical perspectives, and the interrelated ideas of training and resources.

### **Theoretical perspectives on teaching from a distance**

While resources and time are pragmatic aspects to understanding distance teaching, especially as it relates to online instruction, understanding the theoretical underpinnings or teaching meta-theories (a theory that guides the practice of teaching, even if the theory is implicit) found in the distance education literature is likewise important. Lavooy and Newlin (2003) pointed out that the emphasis on the pragmatic or practical aspects of teaching from a distance has harmed the development of quality distance education. They argued that a theoretical grounding to a course, whether online, hybrid, or face-to-face is critical for quality. We do not aim to recreate a primer on educational theory in this brief paper, but rather to explore to what degree the issue of teaching meta-theory is problematized by the literature. Since we approach teaching qualitative research drawing on critical pedagogy and socio-constructivist perspectives, we investigated these perspectives specifically.

Constructivism, a student-centered approach that is a mainstay in the field of education, posits that knowledge is constructed and learning takes place best when students' values and beliefs are drawn into the educational environment (Duffy & Cunningham, 1997; Oliver, 1999). While we all have different views on the idea of constructivism, all three of us draw at least in part on aspects of constructivism, in particular the emphasis on knowledge as a fluid concept and the idea that new knowledge is created cooperatively between student and teacher rather than as a transmission process placing teacher as transmitter and student as receiver. In many ways our belief that qualitative research is relational comes from drawing on tenets of constructivist pedagogy, where knowledge is constructed among teachers and students. The literature shows that the use of constructivist approaches within distance education often falls flat despite good intentions (Herie, 2005; Linder & Rochon, 2003). Constructivist pedagogy highlights experiential learning, the co-creation of knowledge which is often dependent on relationships between faculty and students, and the valuing of students' backgrounds. Although extensive work by Duffy and Cunningham (1997) as well as Hung (2002) emphasized, in particular, that new media tools will enable using a constructivist approach in distance education more effectively, other scholars (Herie, 2005; Linder & Rochon, 2003) pointed out that these tools are not enough to effectively create a more experiential, individualized and relational experience for the online classroom. One reason for this might be that experiential, individualized approaches require relationships and active approaches to learning (e.g., learning by doing particular activities), and these could be more difficult to facilitate in distance mediums.

In addition to constructivist pedagogy, critical pedagogy also informs our work as qualitative researchers. All three of us were trained primarily in critical qualitative research and, while we do not exclusively teach it, critical pedagogy influences the way we make sense of teaching the material. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach to applying the tenets of critical theory. It recognizes that power disrupts equity along racial, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, citizenship, disability, age, and class lines (Carspecken, 1996; Foley,

2002). The critical perspective relies heavily on challenging beliefs and on discourse between everyone in the learning community. The focus on challenging beliefs and on discourse makes critical pedagogy highly relational. Critical pedagogy challenges the distance education paradigm where the relational approach changes dramatically, relying on more limited and often, asynchronous (where students and teachers may not be working at the same time) communication, not just between teacher and student but also between student and student. Green, Edwards, Wolodko, Steward, Brooks, and Littleddyke (2010) reported the results of a collaborative inquiry which aimed at shifting online learning in two early childhood courses towards a more critical, social justice perspective. Three lessons emerged from their work:

- 1) the collective project took a long time to implement successfully (multiple semesters),
- 2) resources, including time, were provided by the university so that distance education implementation did not just fall on faculty members, and
- 3) theory was woven throughout the implementation of the distance education implementation.

These findings are important as they highlight some challenges to distance education such as time, resources, and how to develop this kind of education so that is still connects to the academic discipline. These factors become interesting to consider as we turned to other aspects of the literature review, training and resources for distance education.

### **Training**

Shepherd, Albert, and Koeller (2008) revealed that the primary reason faculty members do not teach online, leave online teaching, or are hesitant to teach in a non-traditional format is a lack of training. They argued that the teaching profession itself tends to be traditional and, citing Laguna and Babcock (1997), pointed out that the shift toward a new model of instruction via online, hybrid, or in a distance format generally represents significant new learning for the teacher. Online and hybrid courses, in particular, require a specialized training that considers both technological and pedagogical savvy (Cuellar, 2002). Indeed a large body of research (Cuellar, 2002; Czubaj, 2004; Magee & Jones, 2004; Shephard, Alpert, & Koeller, 2008; Wiesenber, 1999) reinforced that faculty view the need for training as a primary barrier to beginning any non-traditional teaching. Likewise, studies that have examined faculty development models for preparing college level instructors for distance environments (Hinson, Laprairie, & Cundiff, 2005; Leh, 2005) universally concluded that a strong training program must be present in order to achieve and keep faculty buy-in. A varied approach, providing group and one-on-one support, helps faculty feel more prepared for undertaking instructional reform (Leh, 2005). Additionally, training must be appropriate for the type of material being adapted to the distance paradigm.

Here, our desire to maintain the theoretical assumptions of teaching qualitative research as a relational skill conflicts with the driving training models for distance education, which have emerged in response to courses serving large numbers of students and teaching primarily objective knowledge. In short, we find that while more and more scholarship has been devoted to exploring the training issues that arise with a shift to more distance education, especially within online education, much of this scholarship examines the need for training rather than the content and overall effectiveness of training. This maps onto our own experiences, insofar as training existed, at least to some degree at each of our universities. But, the content of the training ultimately did very little to prepare us to shift our teaching



style to effectively teach a highly relational skill such as qualitative research. Consequently, as our reflections show, we struggled with the process of “how” to teach qualitative research via distance education.

## **Resources**

Fundamentally, the need for training discussed in the previous section already implies resources. Training is, in and of itself, a resource. However, our literature review revealed that both technical resources and time-as-resource emerged as critical to the development of effective distance education. Green et al. (2010) noted that distance education permeates many types of instructing. Even hybrid or off-campus courses generally use some virtual tools to deliver portions of instruction. The resources needed for online instruction are critical to understanding the challenges facing instructors who are teaching at a distance. Christie and Jurado (2009) discussed the variation in Learning Management Systems available for online instruction and likewise pointed out that even large commercial systems such as Blackboard vary from university to university depending on what modules have been purchased.

Early research on distance education consistently has shown that asynchronous learning often lacks rigor and is difficult to assess in terms of impact (Smith & Mitry, 2008). The use of new media has been embraced as a means of making teaching at a distance more interactive and has led to new subject matter being considered for distance teaching (Carlson, 2004). Qualitative research fits into this trend. Chat rooms, virtual universes (e.g., *Second Life*), podcasting, voice over presentations, and videos all provide a wide variety of resources for, in theory, meeting the needs of more relationally-driven curricula (Hjortkjaer, 1998), such as those in qualitative research. But, the literature on online teaching revealed important information about the use of such resources.

First, studies showed that only the most basic functions of the Learning Management System, such as posting a syllabus, web links, or content links were used regularly and effectively by faculty (Christie & Jurado, 2009; Jurado & Pettersson, 2011). Tools that are more interactional (e.g., chat, virtual spaces, interactive video) or those tools which provide a more personal relationship to be forwarded by the instructor (e.g., video, voice, chat, photos) are more commonly used now, although there are variations between programs and schools (Smith & Mitry, 2008). Finally, there is some evidence in the literature that despite these advances in interactive media, the tools still do not provide the same quality of interaction and cognitive development as face-to-face instruction (Drucker, 2000; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005).

Ultimately, the literature also touched on why faculty shy away from these potentially useful tools. The resource of time is one of the major factors. Time emerged as problematic in two ways. The first was a lack of time for actual course development. Few faculty members are given release from other teaching/research/service obligations for new course development, and distance course development is rarely seen as new course development since the course is an existing course being modified for a distance environment (Spector, 2005). However, Spector pointed out that time-as-resource also factored into tenure and promotion where very little consideration is given to what needs to be given up in order to properly develop the tools needed for a more effective distance teaching. It is with an eye toward these challenges that we shift into discussing the teaching of qualitative research more generally.

## Teaching Qualitative Research Methodology

The literature on teaching qualitative research methodology can be divided into three areas: encouraging qualitative coursework in more quantitative fields; using qualitative methods to enhance particular coursework/teaching; and addressing specific methods of teaching qualitative research. We review each below with attention toward how this might play out in distance education.

Articles that encourage the introduction of qualitative methodologies into heavily quantitative fields such as psychology (Forrester & Koutsopoulou, 2008) and geography (Delyser, 2008) argue for the value of incorporating qualitative theoretical perspectives as well as introducing the value of techniques such as interviewing, participant observation, writing field notes, coding, analytic memos, and thinking/writing reflexively. The empirical literature that argues for the use of qualitative methods to enhance teaching in particular content areas identifies certain qualitative methods that can be used for discipline-based studies of teaching in higher education. This research describes how to use student work and other qualitative methods as sources of data for research in the Scholarship on Teaching and Learning (Deale, 2010). These first two areas do not directly pertain to our interests of *how* qualitative research is taught in two different mediums: distance versus traditional. We will turn our attention to the literature that examines the methods used to teach qualitative research methodologies.

Our interest is primarily in how qualitative research methods are taught and, more specifically, if there are differences between distance and traditional formats. The literature shows a wide range of instructional techniques. Scholars describe these instructional techniques using descriptors such as: learning-by-doing (Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007); small group work to experiential activities to reflective writings (Booker, 2009); and problem-based service-learning course model where students work as consultants (Machtmes et al., 2009). The scholarship also recommends that teachers model an appreciation of how texts are constructed, encourage an interactive and empathetic mode of interviewing, and demonstrate models of reporting and interpretation (Pile, 1992). Finally, there are recommendations that faculty employ cooperative learning groups, independent practice, checklists, and rubrics (Frels Sharma, Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Stark, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). In terms of ways to communicate, the literature on teaching finds the following to be useful: student interaction in open forum discussions, lesson-specific discussions, and teaching assistant forums (Kaczynski & Kelly, 2004; Moallem, 2003). The commonality among all these techniques is a focus on building interactions—interactions between students or interactions between faculty and student—that are logical because qualitative research looks at interaction. All of this literature suggests that the teaching of qualitative methodology relies on close interaction between students, their peers, and the faculty member.

The literature also describes the inherent challenges to teaching qualitative research to students who are more likely to have a traditional view of empirical work, that of a positivist understanding that posits a deductive, testable, and observable framework by which to measure outcomes. Students with a positivist understanding may view qualitative research as dichotomous to quantitative techniques and may often critique qualitative research as subjective, lacking pre-ordained designs or operationalized variables, too time consuming, and lacking generalizability of findings (Booker, 2009).

All of this research on the methods of teaching qualitative research draws upon a common supposition at the very heart of qualitative methodology—that qualitative research requires an understanding of different philosophical/theoretical orientations, subsequent exposure to other means of knowing, a challenge to a reliance on numerical measures of

validity, and interaction with subjects. Ultimately, these epistemological (ways of knowing) and ontological (bodies of knowledge) assumptions drive the methods used to teach qualitative research. Since qualitative research requires interaction, the interaction of the researcher with the subject, the researcher is expected to engage with the subjects and materials and engage in a process of thinking and writing reflexively. The analytic and interpretive process asks the researcher to engage with himself/herself through the engagement with others. The method of teaching qualitative research must necessarily *be engaging*. Therefore, as we argued above, teaching qualitative research methods *should not* fundamentally differ by format because the epistemological and ontological suppositions of qualitative research require a format that is interactive, engaging, and reflective—both traditional and distance must teach using interactive, engaging, and reflective methods. In each of our reflective essays we explore the ways we have taught qualitative research both face-to-face and via distance venues. We address the variety of barriers we found to maintaining the foundations of qualitative methodology within distance education.

### **Methodological Approach**

This article, although drawing on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (McKinney, 2007), intends at its heart to be a conceptual conversation about the nature of teaching qualitative research in non-face-to-face settings within schools of education. In order to compare our experiences and draw comparisons between them, we each wrote an essay about teaching qualitative research from a distance. These essays were based on a formalized data collection process, which involved producing teaching reflections during and after teaching in the non-traditional format. We also examined course materials including course products, teaching evaluations, and student comments from both our face-to-face qualitative research teaching and our distance courses. Each of us aimed to create a thick record (Carspecken, 1996), in the form of a reflective essay, of our experiences as educators as we were seeking to adapt our teaching content and pedagogy to a new distance format. We embarked on this collaborative inquiry project because we approached this impending change in our instructional styles both with excitement and trepidation. We recognized as long-time collaborators that a joint reflection would help us make sense of what these changes meant to our practices.

Indeed, we chose this methodological approach, drawing together different pieces of evidence of our teaching, because we ultimately wanted to create a meta-reflection on what we viewed as a fundamental shift not just for us, but, for our field. Our emphasis remains on telling our story and reflecting on what these teaching experiences mean for teaching qualitative research online. We acknowledge the need for additional studies, following a more formal and structured approach to a qualitative comparison of teaching and learning, but maintain that this reflective comparison is an initial first step in the process of reconciling changes in instructional practice.

We began with different preconceptions about this process (one of us skeptical, one of us excited, one of us willing to learn but not totally sure it would work). After independently producing these essays we came together to examine our experiences comparatively. By comparatively, we mean that we undertook a reflective dialogue about each other's experiences and then formally sought to compare our essays to the literature on access, distance education, and qualitative research pedagogy. We intentionally created this process so that we could move from three individual voices on our teaching experiences to understanding what is shared about this experience. Therefore, in moving toward what was shared in our experiences, our hope was that the process would enable us to speak together about what we discovered about our teaching experiences. In our findings section, we

reproduce each initial essay as a basis for the comparison in order for the reader to understand both our individual and shared experiences. We wrote the essays separately and present them this way, comparing them in the end so that we can demonstrate each unique experience.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Each of us was trained in the same traditional Ph.D. program (in a research university with mostly face-to-face classes), studying critical qualitative research alongside our substantive study of education policy which had a heavy emphasis on foundations of education (history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology). Early in our doctoral programs, we each became very interested in methodology, specifically in qualitative research. Consequently, we took many of our research methods courses together, and also engaged in numerous out-of-class readings and discussions of qualitative theory and method alongside a few of our professors. In many ways, qualitative research became a second concentration area for each of us, informally for Rachelle and Cheryl, and formally for Debora who finished a Master's degree in Educational Inquiry along with her Ph.D. All three of us have taught research methods as part of our teaching load, and at the time of this data collection, Debora's formal academic appointment was in educational research, serving an Ed.D. program.

As part of our research process we went through the formal process of reflecting on our assumptions and biases about qualitative research training. All three of us consider our training, which was marked by multiple courses in qualitative research, close personal relationships with our methodology professors, and the opportunity to work collaboratively on understanding qualitative research both practically and theoretically as ideal. Further, we acknowledge that we consider our study of qualitative research during our doctoral training as one of the most rewarding aspects of graduate school. In our qualitative training, we learned much, formed lasting work and personal relationships, and were challenged intellectually through this process.

As we have moved into our professional careers we each noted how our experiences grew in the direct application of research to schools. In our time teaching students that come from a variety of research areas, but are predominantly researching in schools or universities, we have collectively realized how the applied connection to research in schools and universities was not the particular focus in our doctoral program. Instead, our doctoral programs favored theory and application to policy problems. Debora spent two years working at an applied research center directly after graduation. She noted that her the two years at the center were just as critical in her training and has influenced her emphasis on qualitative research as a part of action research, evaluation, and assessment. Nonetheless, it remains clear to all of us that we prefer the intimacy that a traditional face-to-face means of instruction brings. This bias was built in the intense and personal mentorship model we experienced as graduate students.

During our doctoral programs, we created a peer group early in the program and supported each other as peer debriefers (reviewing each other's analysis and writing) and within writing groups that often lasted hours each week. Our experience rang true to more of an apprenticeship model where we worked alongside faculty and were mentored in both teaching and publishing. Each of us entered this reflective project with a concern as to whether online or distance teaching could replicate what we received in our graduate experience. Our assumption was that the model within which we were "raised" to do qualitative work was the best way to learn, partially because we believe that we have been successful in our qualitative careers and partially because our mentors, who we hold in high regard, modeled this intimate and personal apprenticeship learning environment. Nonetheless, we recognized that there might be possible other methods of teaching and although we were

attached to the face-to-face model, we were willing to rethink our bias—indeed it was in this spirit that we wanted to study our experiences.

### **Teaching and Learning in Qualitative Methodology**

We reflect on teaching experiences in qualitative research here. These teaching experiences were instances where we each sought to either formally teach qualitative methods to doctoral students, or, to mentor them through a qualitative research project. These teaching experiences are also representative of three different models of distance education. Rachelle is no longer a teacher of the course(s) she described below in this format (she now teaches only face-to-face) and neither is Debora. Cheryl does continue to teach the class she mentions in her essay.

We each offer a self-study essay that explores individual reflections on teaching. The first essay centers on mentoring dissertation students using only an online medium; the second essay examines adapting a face-to-face qualitative research course to a hybrid model using online media and four off-campus meetings, and finally, the third essay shares reflections on teaching an off-campus workshop-model course. Across the essays you will notice questions such as: (a.) To what are we granting access to in distance courses, (b.) How can interaction be recreated in distance venues, and (c.) What are the instructor's assumptions about course integrity in a distance model?

There are also common themes across all three teaching reflections. Each essay depicts a significant loss of time for each of us in teaching online or distance courses, which may have eventually created a deficit in our other faculty responsibilities (e.g., writing, research). As pre-tenure faculty members working in institutions that necessitated high research productivity, this was a constant concern for us.

Another commonality across all essays is how our theoretical conceptualizations of teaching in a distance medium have practical implications in the delivery of online or distance education. As an example, each of us wanted a direct, one-to-one translation of a face-to-face philosophy of teaching into virtual and distance encounters. We were all trained in a face-to-face model and so we attempted to use a “Google translate” method. That is, we wanted to take what we knew from our experiences in traditional classrooms and make a direct translation to creating online and distance teaching—as compared to viewing it as a potentially different philosophy of teaching. We all continue to struggle with the challenge of directly translating a face-to-face format into a distance format. Lastly, all essays illuminate how distance courses required us to learn the new language of online and distance teaching. While we each had some technology support, we did not receive release time from other required expectations. We all struggled with the possibility that distance teaching could jeopardize other faculty requirements, namely research.

#### **Reflection One – Rachelle Winkle-Wagner - Qualitative Dissertations from a Distance**

I should begin this reflection by mentioning that my doctoral training was in a program with a traditional, apprenticeship model where I had the privilege of working closely with my professors and fellow classmates to learn together. I realize that we offered this background previously, but, it is particularly important to the way I initially approached distance learning. During my doctoral coursework, I took upwards of 33 credit hours of qualitative coursework (and more courses that I audited, not for credit). All of it was in-person. We studied qualitative research and theory alongside one another and our professors, but it was far from a so-called traditional manner of teaching and learning. We met in offices, classrooms, local coffee shops and restaurants, the homes of our professors and fellow

students, and in the field where we conducted observations or interviews. I spent the better part of my doctoral program in living rooms and on patios, and sometimes deep in the woods in cottages, discussing difficult readings and research over a cup of tea, late into the night.

Essentially, I was implicitly trained to think that the only appropriate way to train doctoral students was to do so in a manner that required a great deal of time and energy where people were in the same space, able to look into each other's eyes, and able to have verbal and written conversations about research, writing, and the academic discipline of qualitative research more generally. I was trained that qualitative methodology was entirely about engagement and relationships. This was a critical pedagogy in that the distance between my professors and me was extremely close; I did not feel the sense of deference that many students might feel with their professors. We constructed ideas together and I felt empowered to learn. Needless to say, I was wholly unprepared for a model of teaching and learning that did not allow for me to be in the same physical space as those with whom I was attempting to teach or advise.

My first tenure-track faculty position was in a department that offered an online PhD program in addition to a traditional, on-campus doctoral program. I found the teaching of online doctoral seminars to be extremely difficult, if not painful. The department in which I taught only offered courses in an asynchronous manner, meaning that students could log into the class content at any point during the day or night in order to complete the course requirements. The norm of the department was such that I could have common due dates for students to post their discussions and assignments, but, there was little in the way of a common class experience where we came together at a particular time to talk (or write). I experienced this kind of teaching as a mournful process where I felt like a failure as a teacher. It always pained me to think that my students were not getting what I had as a doctoral student. I felt as if I had completely lost the relational aspect of my teaching, and this would only cause my students to suffer in their learning. There were workshops and training sessions on campus to help identify better online tools, and I went to them, particularly at first. But, I often felt disinclined to participate in these as time went on because it would take time away from my research. There was not much incentive in terms of resources or time to be creative in teaching online. Additionally, none of these workshops helped me to reconcile the loss of the relational and experiential aspects of teaching (they were all about how to manipulate technology).

The students became words on a screen. I grieved this. I use this word in particular because it caused me great physical and emotional stress to be teaching in this way when I did not believe that it was appropriate. Although it is embarrassing to admit, I just could not seem to remember much about many of my students no matter how hard I tried (I attempted everything from flash cards to putting pictures of them in my office). Because no one was in the same space at the same time (or even on an online chat space), hours and days would pass before people would receive peer responses to their comments. Also, I could not seem to keep up with the constancy of the posts. I developed physical problems in my forearms and wrists from the constant writing on-line and the physical consequences of this teaching were hardly helpful to my general demeanor.

It was hugely difficult to know if students were really understanding difficult course material because I suspected that they ultimately were writing about the things that they understood. While I tried various ways to get students to connect such as chat boards, wikis, blogs, and audio or video files, the classes lacked that sense of connection and common experience that I now believe can only be fostered when people come together in the same physical space, at the same time. While I attempted in some ways to embrace this distance education, I unfortunately ended with the same worries with which I began.

The classes were only one part of the sense of loss that I felt in this online environment. Because there was an online PhD program, doctoral students could legitimately complete their entire program, including their dissertations, from a distance. After a few years, the department did institute a policy whereby doctoral students were required to come to campus for various parts of their doctoral degree, but the bulk of the advising was done via distance education.

My doctoral students were from all over the country and the world. Some students were at the other end of the state, some were across the country, and one of my doctoral advisees was living in Eastern Africa, among other places. The sense of loss pervaded my advising as it did my teaching. I did not feel engaged or able to connect relationally with these students. Not only could I not sit in a classroom with my students to help them learn; I literally did not even meet some students until the end of their degree programs. Some would come for graduation and they would have to introduce themselves to me or I would not have recognized them. Reflecting back on this advising and teaching of qualitative research, there are a few lessons and issues that occur to me.

### **Access, qualitative teaching and learning, and distance education**

The sense of loss that I felt in advising my doctoral students online was likely because of my own sense of betrayal of my training. I could not figure out how to conduct an apprenticeship style of training with my students in the distance setting. I also felt a sense of loss at what the students were actually getting in their training (and at what they were *not* getting). For example, some of my students' transcripts showed the same qualitative courses, with the same course number as the other students (in other departments, primarily) were taking in face-to-face courses. But the same faculty who taught the in-person courses did not always teach the on-line classes. There was also no monitoring of what was actually covered in the online versions of these courses. The students who I advised often had not been exposed to basic concepts of qualitative research (e.g., how to analyze data, how to conduct an interview) in their online qualitative coursework. I would attempt to teach students about the basics of qualitative methods on an individual basis, via the phone or Skype or similar tools. Not only did this take an enormous amount of time for me as a pre-tenure faculty member, but, it also was not as effective as having students learn methodologies before they started conducting their research. In sum, I am left with a couple of questions: If online education is in part about providing access to education, what are students being given access to in qualitative courses that are on-line?

While my students had these courses on their transcripts, they did *not* have the same training in qualitative methodology as those students who took the course in the in-person version. This became problematic for some of the students as they attempted to conduct their dissertation research. But when I heard some of these online students voice a desire to become faculty members, I became very worried that they simply had not been trained well enough to have their own research programs, or to be able to teach their own graduate students. Some of these students did not progress through their programs, taking years to complete chapters of their dissertation. On average, most of the students were taking upwards of five or nine years to complete their degrees. Some of the students silently disappeared; I suppose this also happens with students who are not trained via distance technology, but there is something more tangible about a student who has disappeared to a library. Some students were still in my drawer as a file of a student I was supposed to advise, but, we lost track of one another. Full years went by where I did not hear from them, even despite attempts on my part to contact them (I sent emails to all my advisees at least one time per semester).

After a few years, I made the decision to join the faculty at another university. I still had a few doctoral students who had started their programs at the first institution. The difference in these students though was that they had taken the bulk of their coursework in-person. Because of my leaving the institution, I advised those from my previous institution in a distance format during their dissertations. Both of these students successfully defended their dissertations recently and I could not be prouder of the quality of their projects. During our distance advising process, we were able to schedule weekly phone meetings, I met each of the students in person at national conferences, and occasionally, we did a video teleconference call (i.e., Skype) so we could see each other. We emailed constantly, the students had my cell phone number and would sometimes send a quick question via text messaging or even on Facebook. These students were getting their advising on qualitative methodology from a distance.

The biggest difference in these two instances was that the second group of students completed a significant portion of their coursework in-person and worked with me closely in person before we started to work together from a distance. We had already solidified our relationships with each other. I had personally trained these two students in an apprenticeship style of advising (e.g., spending large amounts of time with them, having them shadow and write with me on research, etc.). By the time the students were getting distance advising from me on qualitative methods, they had already taken a significant amount of coursework from me (in person) and they had already seen (if not experienced through opportunities to collect interviews or analyze data) the full research process by working closely with me.

I find the general idea of providing educational access to students via online courses compelling. Yet it is imperative that we begin to uncover *to what* students are being given access. Perhaps there is a lesson here for creating opportunities for hybrid models of advising. I remain suspicious as to whether the totality of qualitative research advising could be done well from a distance without some opportunities for in-person engagement. It seems that at least from my own reflection of teaching and learning, a significant portion of the learning should occur in-person before the advising process could be transitioned to a distance venue.

### **Reflection Two - Debora Hinderliter Ortloff – External Pressures to Move to Online Learning**

My own journey toward, and ultimately away from online education begins as my regional university faced pressure to compete with for-profit and other universities who were offering a substantial number of online programs, even at the doctoral level. Most of our faculty were highly resistant, to put it politely. These faculty meetings where we discussed the need to “be competitive” were the kind of heated, highly political debates that make many of us junior faculty want to disappear into the chairs we were sitting on for fear of saying something wrong. There was a real sense that any discussion of online teaching at the doctoral level would compromise our integrity as professors and our quality of instruction. Several of our colleagues, experts in instructional technology, discussed both the trends in distance education and presented tools that would make developing hybrid courses easier and more effective. Somewhere in the midst of all this I remember speaking up and reminding my colleagues that there was an important discussion about access to education that we were missing.

Distance education of all sorts, whether off-campus, hybrid, online, etc., begins as a means of serving students who are not traditionally served by the university. It is about access. I am not naive enough to think this does not serve the economic interest of the university, but as a scholar devoted to social justice I felt moved to speak up for the promise of moving parts of our program online. I talked about my students who worked in schools



that literally required them to pick up condoms and needles off the playground before they let the kids out for recess and how they worry because they are chronically late to class because of crises at work. I talked about my students who drove two hours to class because there were not programs in educational leadership from non-profit universities available in their rural communities and they wanted a “real” degree. I spoke about my students who worked all day at a local school, battled traffic for 1.5 hours to class, and then returned to home to care for their special needs kids and aging parents. These were not hypothetical or hyperbolic examples, they were our students’ stories. The reality was that even at the doctoral level these students could use better access, more flexibility, and the chance to continue their education while maintaining some semblance of job, family, and sanity. Not surprisingly, my little outburst meant I had to volunteer to adapt my course in the first round of moving our program both to an additional off-campus facility and to a hybrid model of delivery.

### **Developing an on-line course with a checklist and ideals**

Looking back at my course development notes, I can identify my enthusiasm pretty readily. I kept writing in the margins “make it easy for them to find information,” “make discussions meaningful and worth their time,” “make assignments flexible to their research interests,” “work with their schedules,” and then over and over, “make it work!” My process in adapting the course involved me taking my existing face-to-face class and looking at each topic in order to contemplate how to

- 1) teach the content,
- 2) engage the students, and
- 3) assess the knowledge.

I remember staring at the first topic on the use of theory in qualitative research for a week. I had my checklist, I had my ideals, and I had no idea what to do to convey this knowledge without talking to my students. I created a PowerPoint, annotated it in the notes section with things I would normally say and felt confident that it would get better since theory is exceedingly difficult to teach in one unit anyway. But every task I examined seemed the same. In my face-to-face class I rely on group work exercises, on discussion and on dialogue, not to mention my personality, to convey ideas.

PowerPoint presentations with notes were not the same, not by a long shot. Our instructional designers, who were made available to help with any course going online for the first time, were helpful and made suggestions such as using Wimba classroom (a virtual classroom space), but I think they likewise struggled with the extent to which I was trying to find a way to recreate interaction. And beyond simply being a flat version of what I wanted to teach, the preparation took hours upon hours. In examining how long it took me to prepare to teach the hybrid course versus the face-to-face course, estimated through my calendar in which I note what I work on each day, the difference is astounding.

### **Examining the resource of time**

The first time I prepped my qualitative research course for face-to-face instruction, it took about 40 hours to write the syllabus, create assessments, and find and annotate readings. My hybrid course, in which all the readings were already selected because they were the same as the face-to-face class, took 80 hours to prepare, and that was not even well-prepared, it was just simply prepared enough to work. For the most part this was because I was trying to recreate in-class activities, the type of activity that is the hallmark of most qualitative

research training. Exercises on observing, such as placing a still life in the front of the room and asking students to sketch it from different perspectives or doing mock interviews using different types of protocol questions were nearly impossible to recreate within reason in a virtual environment. For such exercises I tried some synchronous work, but scheduling was very challenging. I had students do interview practice on their own and submit reflections as well as drafts of protocols, but I struggled to give them feedback because I needed to hear them and see them in order to help their skills improve. Again, in theory use of video or audio may help, but it is challenging to implement that across a class.

Even moving more standard content such as principles of validity, ethics, or learning to critique different designs, although certainly easier to establish online, were not simple to adapt. As I moved to delivering the course, my students quickly noted that they were waiting for the face-to-face class periods to understand what was going on. Students expressed frustration at not being able to hear my voice or have me re-explain things when they did not understand a concept. They rightfully said, such as this student in an email to me: "I think I get it when I read your PowerPoint and do the reading, but then I don't really because I couldn't do it myself, I couldn't tell you anything without just reading the PowerPoint out loud." So I started including video lectures, which my students loved. But preparing a video lecture took huge amounts of time, on average 10 hours, and was technologically challenging, at least for me. In an effort to connect with my students better I instituted phone conferences using Skype or regular phone. This helped immensely, but meant I was having 20-30 conferences a week. The sheer volume overwhelmed me.

### **Contemplating some of the wins**

In the midst of all this, I had some wins. I moved discussions to Facebook so they could be organic, students posted when they wanted to and without requirement to respond directly to a reading. This cut way down on the pro-forma posts. I encouraged students to post links to stories in the news about research or education policy, and to comment on how this was connected with course topics. Voluntary discussion postings were higher by 1/3 than the mandatory ones I had been holding on Blackboard and responses by classmates to these postings doubled. Indeed by providing only minimal structure to the discussions and weighing in to the discussion or posting my own links seemed to be a much better solution than adding in a lot of required assessments.

But while the shift to Facebook and the use of video lectures were important improvements to the course that allowed me to develop relationship in a way more similar to what I would do in class, fundamentally the course failed to really move a lot of learning to the online environment. My lecture notes for the four face-to-face classes provide evidence of this fact. I covered in each of those lectures three times as many topics as I would in a comparable lecture in my 100% face-to-face course, even asking students to stay late for the last two classes so I could get in additional lecture material. I did much of my mentoring by phone or Skype, eschewing the constant grading/re-grading cycle that is indicative of the online environment. I also did not even manage to finish the revisions to a simple "revise and resubmit" in that semester because the amount of time I spent on my teaching increased by 20 hours a week.

Ultimately, my students' final papers were okay, comparable for the most part to the face-to-face although with considerably less emphasis on theoretical perspective. Their interview and observation assignments required on average two times as many drafts before I would allow the student to turn it in for a grade. I needed to explain and re-explain my feedback on question development and observation note-taking, because in-class practice could not be easily replicated in the online format.

Overall, my students grades were about the same, whether in face-to-face or online, although, that may have somewhat to do with my own grading practices. My evaluations, however, were one standard deviation lower than for my face-to-face class. And the students' comments were telling: "Dr. Ortloff is one of my favorite profs and I loved her last summer, but this class is too much online, too many PowerPoints and not enough of her. I am not sure I am really ready for my dissertation, but I know I can call her or email her and she will help me with the methodology section, so that is good."

I taught this course in this format once more. I made adjustments and had more time to work on some of the material, but the end result was somewhat similar. There is dissatisfaction on my part and on the part of the students, at least to some degree. I still believe that my students deserve access to education in a format that recognizes the complexity of their lives. I still believe in the promise of online education. I am not sure I still believe in my ability to deliver that promise.

### **Reflection Three – Cheryl A. Hunter – Considering the Evidence to Examine Course Integrity**

I teach a weekly three-hour seminar course spanning the full 15-week semester and a distance course that meets three weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) over the course of half a semester. I was interested in understanding how I was meeting or not meeting the distance students' needs, with the assumption (a potential bias that I had) that they were potentially being "short-changed." So I began the process of self-study by examining course materials paired with self-reflection upon my teaching. I started at the course-level deciding what "data" I could use to answer the question, "How did I address integrity in both the learning experience and the building of qualitative research skills in a distance learning environment as compared to my traditional course?" I decided that the course syllabi, course assessments, teaching notes, student emails, and student course evaluations would serve as comparative data for examining potential differences in course integrity. I looked at the data across four classes—two sections of weekly seminar and two sections of distance—so the data remained a limited amount. I defined the measure of course integrity as covering the following categories: course delivery (learning experiences), breadth of skills covered, depth of skills covered, and overall student understanding. I created a matrix to represent the different measures of integrity across the different course delivery methods. I compared all pieces of evidence from weekly-seminar and distance in each of the categories.

#### **Breadth and depth of skills covered**

While there was not a difference between the prescribed course content in terms of depth and breadth of skills, there were two areas where depth and breadth of skills differed based upon the student evidence. First, distance students collected a greater quantity of data with no noticeable difference in the quality of data. Distance students averaged two more pages for their written observation assignment and averaged 10 minutes longer than the required length for the interview assignment. In contrast, the weekly in-person students averaged five minutes under the required length for interviews. There was not a noticeable difference in the quality of the descriptions or of the interviews or transcriptions. Students in both groups made similar mistakes, such as too much interpretation in the raw observational data, lack of clarity in transcription legends, and missed opportunities for probing or follow-up questions in interviews.

Secondly, there were noticeable differences in the quality of the analysis between the two delivery methods. Looking at the final student assessment as a product of breadth and

depth of analysis, there was a noticeable difference in coding and themes. Distance students' categories represented more complexity of analysis overall. I examined the total number of initial codes, the different number of categories used in creating a theme, and the level of complexity in the argumentation explaining the relationships. Distance students averaged more overall codes, more categories to explain patterns in codes, and overall argued more complex relationships for themes.

### **Course delivery and learning experiences**

There were few noticeable differences in terms of course delivery and the organization of the learning experience based on the evidence collected. The syllabi, readings, and course activities were all comparable. When looking at class notes and attendance, it did become evident that distance students experienced more class activities overall because they were all required to attend every session. Weekly, in-person students averaged one missed class whereas distance students did not miss any course-time. The other notable difference in learning experiences arose from reviewing course evaluations. Distance students consistently referenced the amount of feedback they received, explaining that overall they did not typically receive a high level of feedback in their distance courses. This might suggest that weekly students received more and potentially better quality of feedback simply because they interacted more frequently with the instructor.

Looking at the course feedback, distance students did receive a lower quantity of feedback for the end of course assessment. Feedback is audio recorded so I averaged the time for each delivery method and then listened to a sample from each group for potential qualitative differences. Distance students received an average of three minutes less of audio feedback. However, I did not observe differences in the quality of the feedback between the two styles of teaching.

**Student learning/competency.** In terms of student understanding/competency there was a quantitative difference in final course grades, with distance students scoring slightly higher than weekly students. Distance students averaged 93% and weekly students averaged a 92%. There was no difference between average length of final papers or average numbers of references. There was a notable, qualitative difference in the final product when examined across the delivery methods. The distance students produced a better quality of final product than their weekly counterparts. The final analysis document, as mentioned previously, had greater complexity in coding, themes, and argumentation for the relationships supposed.

However, it is very important to also include context that could help explain some of these differences. The distance group of students was based on a cohort model. Students entered the program as a group and worked through a majority of their coursework together. With these particular groups there is a collaborative ethos and students engaged outside of class (often online) together and on their own accord. There is a lot of sharing of information and independent organization of peer reviews. Based upon my anecdotal class notes and student correspondence with me, there appeared to be more conversations and engagement with the course material by the students outside of class time and with their peers.

After using course evidence to examine the question of integrity across different course delivery models I then moved onto the self-study asking myself "How much of this integrity of the course is about my perceptions of the value of my teaching?" I began by reviewing my personal course notes, my written teaching reflections for my evaluation file, and turning a critical eye to what I discovered with the content analysis. I wrote memos about what I noticed and looked for way to be critical of my teaching and therefore my assumptions about my teaching.

### **Integrity and the teaching ego**

I was resistant to the distance format because I believed that condensing the time by which to cover material/skills would result in less student understanding/poorer skill and lower quality in the final product. I resisted the distance format and my main argument was that I could not cover teaching 15 weeks of content over three weekends as a total of six days teaching. The main concern was covering total content. Upon reflection, I found myself making a quantity argument that surprised me. I needed to cover X number of articles or X number of chapters. I was stuck in a quantity mode versus a re-examination of the type of content and how that could be covered with focusing on particular qualities of an article or chapter that really offered multiple concepts within one reading. I then realized that I needed to find the article that demonstrated multiple concepts, meaning I had to search hard to build that into my materials. I found myself looking for the one article that did everything: clear structure of a research journal article, clear articulation of theoretical foundations as connected to the methodology, demonstration of how validity was addressed in both design and analysis, excellent example of incorporating observational data into the narrative, excellent use of quotations, and subsequent clear interpretation of the data with participant voices represented. I started looking at my materials in how they would help me address the workshop model and got rid of many readings that served only one purpose. I returned to the notion of complexity—the need to build that complexity that was taken-for-granted within my weekly classes. The workshop model did not mean I should abandon complexity (which was my original concern because of the time constraints) but rather I had to build that complexity in a different way.

I also came face-to-face with my teaching ego. I believed they could not learn as much because we did not have as much time together or that the longer format would inhibit my ability to teach. It is a long weekend and personally tiring and I could see how my abilities declined after several hours. But did that really mean that they could not learn as much without me? Some of my resistance was based on my assumption that I personally could not provide the same quality of instruction. My teaching ego was clearly at play. Even though I know that when I sit back in class, remove myself, and let a misconception get aired it will typically get corrected by peers. So I started to ask the question, “Where am I not as important?”

This question as to my importance as the teacher, forced me to start by considering what someone else could do within my delivery approach. This idea of examining my own importance seemed so simple, but, it was difficult! I think I am a good teacher and if it is not my explanation or me there for the discussion then somehow quality might suffer or there will be misconceptions and I will miss the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings. Stepping back, I realized this assumption focused on a short-term model, that the learning was encapsulated within the class time frame, and based on meeting week to week. What an assumption! I should know better. Learning is ongoing and not encapsulated in the time we are together in class (my teaching ego again). I simply build those on-going learning opportunities with lots of chances to revisit concepts and misconceptions can right themselves on their own—and if not, that is for class time and where I can step in. I clearly realized that letting that happen on its own is better than me doing it.

I was also resistant because I felt like the distance students would disengage and could not digest all the material because of the length of time on the weekend. I assumed that there would be overload and after a few hours we could not really keep engaging. This assumption was based on taking my 15 weekly lessons and simply reorganizing them into sets of six daily lessons to deliver back-to-back class sessions. What was I thinking? There are benefits to the extended time with the workshop model—such as opportunities to close the loop and

circle back making connections from a few hours ago versus a few weeks ago—but I was not taking advantage of that. Ultimately my sense of course integrity was tied too closely to my teaching ego. My realization was that letting go of “me as central to the process” does not necessarily equate to a loss of course integrity. I simply had to consider maintaining the integrity in different ways.

However, there is one element of integrity that was compromised and that was integrity related to my own productivity. It was more physically and mentally exhausting in a nine hour day versus three hours over three weeks. Likewise the travel time (eight hours round trip) took a full workday out each weekend trip. I “lost” three eight-hour workdays each semester in driving. Time is one element that is finite. I cannot produce more time in a day nor can I change the amount of time it took to drive. The time loss was significant because it created a deficit in other areas that could I simply could not control and the integrity of my other requirements were impacted.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

We each entered into distance education with different levels of enthusiasm. Some of us were excited to try it, while others of us were resistant to it from the beginning. We all had a notion of qualitative teaching that was rooted in the idea of qualitative research being linked to engagement and relationships. We all found distance education to be challenging to our personal teaching philosophies, and to the way we wanted to teach qualitative methodology. Yet there were some successes that merit mentioning here. There are a few trends that we note below.

Teaching via distance formats requires financial and time resources. It takes a great deal of time to learn and utilize some of the tools that may make distance education, particularly online learning, more relational and engaging. Debora’s reflection offered the example of narrated PowerPoints that took upwards of 10 hours to complete. As a pre-tenure faculty member, this kind of time expenditure is difficult, given the demands of research that are required. Rachelle’s reflection demonstrated her resistance to use some of the available resources because of being worried about it taking time and energy away from her research agenda. Cheryl’s reflection detailed the amount of work time lost simply in commuting that inevitably impacted her research productivity. For all of us there was a sacrifice of moving our courses to the online format that was a challenge as pre-tenured faculty at institutions that required extensive research productivity.

Hybrid models, where there are some times when students come together with the faculty member, might be more satisfying, if not better, teaching models. Cheryl’s discussion also offered an example of how hybrid models might be very successful ways to balance the need to provide distance access while also remaining true to a philosophy of teaching qualitative methodology that is rooted in relationships. While Rachelle gave an example of advising dissertation students on qualitative methods that worked well, part of that success was because the students had spent a great deal of time in-person with her before being advised via distance methods.

We wonder if in order to be successful at teaching qualitative coursework via a distance we must envision ourselves as another kind of teacher? Cheryl pointed out the need to put ego aside and envision us as facilitators of learning. Likewise Debora alluded to being able to think in a different way and to devote time to material development rather than depending on your persona to teach. In some ways, we recognize that online teaching is a lesson in good teaching insofar as it demands an attention to outcomes, assessment, and transparency that can be hidden behind the closed door of the classroom. But in the end, we still question whether any of these changes to our teaching philosophies would be enough to

recreate the relationship between teacher and student in a way that does justice to the qualitative paradigm, especially in a 100% online environment.

Finally, we recommend an examination of what students are gaining access to when they learn qualitative methodology via distance technologies. It seems that the teaching and learning both differ in distance teaching and learning. More empirical work is needed to capture whether this is the case.

Based on these reflections of teaching and learning, we have the following suggestions for those who plan to teach qualitative methodology via distance technology:

- 1) Work within faculty governance to set-up favorable policies: Suggest that first time teaching in online and distance models be given some additional weight in faculty evaluation; speak-up about some courses being more effective than others in an online format; consider hybrid formats that still allow for some face-to-face time; advocate for course release time for course planning.
- 2) Plan ahead: faculty members need at least one semester, if not a full year, to prep the course.
- 3) Learn the technology: It would be useful to explore interactive technologies like video, Skype, etc. to mirror face-to-face learning. The more one can prepare ahead of time, the more time will be available for interacting with students during the semester.
- 4) Use existing resources such as YouTube videos or webinars on NVIVO qualitative coding software in order to provide students content that is more than reading and PowerPoint.
- 5) Consider students as resources: Think about setting up a formal peer-editing plan. There is a great deal of typing in distance education and this will help mitigate this issue. Use audio feedback when possible to offer more detailed feedback with less typing time.

The move toward putting more courses online is inevitable regardless of how we feel toward the particular medium, making our reflective essays especially timely. It is important to explore how faculty adapt to this medium, how they grapple with the implications for course integrity, and whether these adaptations cause shifts in our own philosophies of education.

## References

- Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2010). *Class differences: Online education in the United States in 2010*. Oakland, CA: The Babson Group and Sloan Consortium.
- Anderson, T. (2001). The hidden curriculum in distance education: An updated view. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 33(6), 28-35.
- Booker, K. (2009). Shifting priorities: Reflections on teaching qualitative research methods. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(3), 389-394. Retrieved from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR14-3/booker.pdf>
- Carlson, S. (2004). Online education finds unexpectedly high enrollment growth. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(14), A30.
- Carnevale, D. (2005). Offering entire degrees online is one key to distance education, survey finds. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(22). Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Offering-Entire-Degrees-Online/22121>
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- Christie, M., & Jurado, R. G. (2009). Barriers to innovation in online pedagogy. *European Journal of Engineering Education, 34*(3), 273-279.
- Cuellar, N. (2002). The transition from classroom to online teaching. *Nursing Forum, 37*(3), 5-14.
- Czubaj, C. (2004). Internet review: Educator concerns regarding cyberspace curricula. *Education, 125*(1), 15-20.
- Deale, C. S. (2010). What teachers learn from students: Focusing on the use of student products and qualitative methods in the scholarship of teaching and learning in hospitality and tourism. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism, 10*(4), 378-394.
- De La Rosa, M. L. (2006). Is opportunity knocking? Low-income students' perceptions of college and financial aid. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*(12), 1670-1686.
- Delyser, D. (2008). Teaching qualitative research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 32*(2), 233-244.
- DesJardins, S. L., & Toutkoushian, R. K. (2005). Are students really rational? The development of rational thought and its application to student choice. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 191-240). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Drucker, P. (2000, May). Putting more now into knowledge. *Forbes, 165*, 84-88.
- Duffy, T. M., & Cunningham, D. J. (1997). Constructivism: Implications for the design and delivery of instruction. In D. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of research in education, communication, and technology* (pp. 170-198). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Foley, D. E. (2002). Critical ethnography: The reflexive turn. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 15*(4), 469-490.
- Forrester, M., & Koutsopoulou, G. (2008). Providing resources for enhancing the teaching of qualitative methods at the undergraduate level: Current practices and the work of the HEA Psychology Network Group. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 5*, 173-178.
- Freeman, K. (1999). The race factor in African Americans' college choice. *Urban Education, 34*(1), 4-25.
- Frels, R. K., Sharma, B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., & Stark, M. D. (2011). The use of a checklist and qualitative notebooks for an interactive process of teaching and learning qualitative research. *The Journal of Effective Teaching, 11*(1), 62-79.
- Garrison, D. R., & Cleveland-Innes, M. (2005). Facilitating cognitive presence in online learning: Interaction is not enough. *The American Journal of Distance Education, 19*(3), 133-148.
- Green, N. C., Edwards, H., Wolodko, B., Steward, C., Brooks, M., & Littledyke, R. (2010). Reconceptualising higher education pedagogy in online learning. *Distance Education, 31*(3), 257-273.
- Hinson, J. M., Laprairie, K. N., & Cundiff, J. M. (2005). Today's smart educators are tailoring professional development to critical need—and you can, too. *The Journal, 32*(11), 27-30.
- Hjortkjaer, C. (1998). *Fjernundervisning paa Internettet og brug af IT i Undervisning: En Redegoerelse [Distance education on the Internet and use of IT in teaching: A review]*. Copenhagen, Denmark: University of Denmark.
- Holley, L. C., Risley-Curtiss, C., Stott, T., Jackson, D. R., & Nelson, R. (2007). "It's not scary": Empowering women students to become researchers. *Affilia, 22*(1), 99-115.
- Hossler, D., Braxton, J., & Coopersmith, G. (1989). Understanding student college choice. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 5, pp. 231-288). New York, NY: Agathon Press.
- Hung, D. (2002). Metaphorical ideas as mediating artifacts for the social construction of knowledge: Implications from the writings of Dewey and Vygotsky. *International*



- Journal of Instructional Media*, 29(2), 197-214.
- Huntley, M., & Mather, M. A. (1999). Distance learning gathers speed and depth. *Technology & Learning*, 20, 75-80.
- Jurado, R. G., & Pettersson, T. (2011). The use of learning management systems: A longitudinal case study. *E-learning and Education*, 8, 1-12.
- Kaczynski, D., & Kelly, M. (2004, November). *Curriculum development for teaching qualitative data analysis online*. Paper presented at QualIT2004: International Conference on Qualitative Research in IT & IT in Qualitative Research, Brisbane, Australia.
- Kane, T. J. (2006). Public intervention in post-secondary education. In E. Hanushek & F. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of education* (Vol. 2, pp. 1369-1401). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier.
- Kaya, T. (2010, November). Enrollment in online courses increases at the highest rate ever. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/enrollment-in-online-courses-increases-at-the-highest-rate-ever/28204>
- Laguna, K., & Babcock, L. (1997). Computer anxiety in young and older adults: Implications for human-computer interactions in older populations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 13, 317-326.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lavooy, M. J., & Newlin, M. H. (2003). Computer mediated communication: Online instruction and interactivity. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 14(2), 157-165.
- Leh, A. S. (2005). Lessons learned from service learning and reverse mentoring in faculty development: A case study in technology training. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(1), 25-41.
- Linder, U., & Rochon, R. (2003). Using chat to support collaborative learning: Quality assurance strategies to promote success. *Educational Media International*, 40(1-2), 75-90.
- Machtmes, K., Johnson, E., Fox, J., Burke, M., Harper, J., Arcemont, L., ... Reynaud, A. L. (2009). Teaching qualitative research methods through service-learning. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(1), 155-164. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR14-1/machtmes.pdf>
- Magee, J., & Jones, E. (2004). Leave no grown-up behind: Coming to terms with technology. *Young Children*, 59(3), 13-21.
- McKinney, K. (2007). *Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and learning*. Williston, VT: Anker.
- Moallem, M. (2003). An interactive online course: A collaborative design model. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 51(4), 85-103.
- Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., Jones, M., & Datnow, A. (1997). Detracking: The social construction of ability, cultural politics and resistance to reform. *Teachers College Record*, 98(2), 482-510.
- Oliver, R. (1999). Exploring strategies for online teaching and learning. *Distance Education*, 20(2), 240-254.
- Onwuegbuzie, A., Leech, N., Slate, J., Stark, M., Sharma, B., Frels, R., ... Combs, J. (2012). An exemplar for teaching and learning qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(1), 16-77. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17-1/onwuegbuzie.pdf>

- Paulsen, M. B. (2001). The economics of human capital and investment in higher education. In M. B. Paulsen & J. C. Smart (Eds.), *The finance of higher education: Theory, research, policy and practice* (pp. 55-94). New York, NY: Agathon Press.
- Perna, L. W. (2006). Understanding the relationship between information about college prices and financial aid and students' college-related behaviors. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(12), 1620-1635.
- Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. A. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), 485-518.
- Phipps, R., & Merisotis, J. (1999). *What's the difference? A review of contemporary research on the effectiveness of distance learning in higher education*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/%5Cassets%5Cfiles%5Cpublications/S-Z/WhatDifference.pdf>
- Pile, S. (1992). Oral history and teaching qualitative methods. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 16(2), 135-143.
- Rowan-Kenyon, H. T. (2007). Predictors of delayed college enrollment and the impact of socioeconomic status. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78, 188-214.
- Shephard, C., Albert, M., & Koeller, M. (2008). Increasing the efficacy of educators teaching online. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(3), 173-179.
- Smith, D. E., & Mitry, D. J. (2008). Investigation of higher education: The real costs and quality of online programs. *Journal for Education for Business*, 83(3), 147-152.
- Spector, J. (2005). Time demands in online instruction. *Distance Education*, 26(1), 5-28.
- St. John, E. P., Paulsen, M. B., & Carter, D. F. (2005). Diversity, college costs, and postsecondary opportunity: An examination of the financial nexus between college choice and persistence for African Americans and Whites. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), 545-569.
- Tierney, W. G., Corwin, Z. B., & Colyar, J. E. (Eds.). (2005). *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.
- Valadez, J. R. (2008). Shaping the educational decisions of Mexican immigrant high school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(4), 834-860.
- Wiesenberg, F. (1999). Teaching online: One instructor's evolving theory of practice. *Adult Basic Education*, 9(3), 149-162.
- Winkle-Wagner, R., & Locks, A. (2013). *Diversity and inclusion on campus: Supporting racially and ethnically underrepresented students in higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wooldridge, A. (2005). The brains business: A survey of higher education. *The Economist*, 376 (4). Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/4339960>
- Yonezawa, S., Wells, A. S., & Serna, I. (2002). Choosing tracking: "Freedom of choice" in detracking schools. *American Education Research Journal*, 39(37), 37-67.

### Author Note

Cheryl A. Hunter is an Assistant Professor in Educational Foundations and Research at the University of North Dakota. I consider myself a translational researcher, producing research that reaches the people of which it is intended in a practical way and contributes to improving their life experiences or professional practice. My research in the sociology of teaching and learning has focused on gendered experiences within alternative educational sites, such as alternative schools and hospital birthing centers, intercultural experiences in teacher education and education leadership programs, and unique challenges in rural education. This work has been published in the *Annual Review of Comparative and*

*International Education, Ethnography and Education, Anthropology and Medicine, Journal of Education for Teaching, Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice, Multicultural Perspectives*, Routledge Publishers, and Palgrave Publishers. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Cheryl A. Hunter, PhD, Assistant Professor at Educational Foundations and Research, College of Education and Human Development, University of North Dakota, P.O. Box 7189, Grand Forks, ND, 58202. Phone: (701) 777-3431, Fax: (701) 777-0121, or Email: Cheryl.hunter@email.und.edu

Debora Hinderliter Ortloff is an assistant professor in the department of social sciences at Finger Lakes Community College. She also serves as director of academic assessment. She is currently leading an effort to create a new learning framework for the college articulating college values with course level learning. Prior to beginning at FLCC, Dr. Ortloff served as an assistant professor at University of Houston Clear Lake, where she taught qualitative and mixed method research methodology. Her research spans a wide-range of topics, most notably including global citizenship and school internationalization. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: Debora Hinderliter Ortloff, Finger Lakes Community College, 3325 Marvin Sands Drive, Canandaigua, NY 14424-8395, Phone: (585) 785-1351; Email: E-debora.ortloff@flcc.edu

Rachelle Winkle-Wagner is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research focuses on the access and success of underrepresented students in higher education. She is the author of the book, *The Unchosen Me: Race, gender, and identity among Black women in college* (2009, Johns Hopkins University Press), *Diversity and Inclusion on Campus* (2014, Routledge), and *Cultural Capital: The uses and abuses of a key theoretical concept in educational research* (2010, Jossey-Bass). Winkle-Wagner's research has also appeared in journals such as *Review of Educational Research*, *The Review of Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, and *The Journal of Higher Education*. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, 270k Education Building, 1000 Bascom Mall, Madison, WI 53706-1326, Phone: (608) 265-4955; Email: winklewagner@wisc.edu

Copyright 2014: Cheryl A. Hunter, Debora Hinderliter Ortloff, Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, and Nova Southeastern University.

#### Article Citation

Hunter, C. A., Hinderliter Ortloff, D., Winkle-Wagner, R. (2014). Out of our comfort zones: Reflections about teaching qualitative research at a distance. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(T & L 3), 1-25. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/hunter3.pdf>

---