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Teaching Qualitative Research Teachers about Teaching Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Rosalind Hurworth's (2008) new book, *Teaching Qualitative Research: Cases and Issues*, presents its readers with a well-researched and detailed account of contemporary qualitative research education. Based upon her extensive review of the literature and field work observing faculty members and students in a variety of classroom settings, Hurworth shares the lessons she learned from this investigation and offers readers a long list of ways we can improve how we help our students and ourselves to learn qualitative research.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Teaching, Learning

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Teaching Qualitative Research Teachers about Teaching Qualitative Research

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Rosalind Hurworth's (2008) new book, Teaching Qualitative Research: Cases and Issues, presents its readers with a well-researched and detailed account of contemporary qualitative research education. Based upon her extensive review of the literature and field work observing faculty members and students in a variety of classroom settings, Hurworth shares the lessons she learned from this investigation and offers readers a long list of ways we can improve how we help our students and ourselves to learn qualitative research. Key Words: Qualitative Research, Teaching, and Learning

Without a doubt, Rosalind Hurworth's (2008) new book, *Teaching Qualitative Research: Cases and Issues*, is the most in-depth presentation on the particulars and challenges faculty face when helping students learn the theory and practice of qualitative research. Based upon a decade long examination of teachers teaching qualitative research and the collection of reflective and prescriptive published accounts on this difficult practice, Hurworth shares the results of her investigation in the form of a thick description of the art and science of the craft with ample prescriptions and guidance to help mentor teachers of qualitative research from the novice to the seasoned veteran.

Like a good qualitative researcher Hurworth starts her study of this pedagogical phenomenon by reviewing what is known and not known about the subject and articulating the importance of taking an in-depth, naturalistic examination of teaching qualitative research. In the wonderfully detailed first two chapters Hurworth presents her readers with the most exhaustive account of the major issues of instructing qualitative research I have seen. The expansiveness of her focus and the richness of her citations make these two chapters required reading for anyone wishing to embark on a study regarding qualitative research pedagogy. I also find the chapters exemplify Hurworth's knack for reviewing expansive stretches' of the literature in an economical style highlighted by her ability to capture the lessons shared so we can appreciate the content as well as the results of her reviews.

In these panoramic reflections on teaching qualitative research Hurworth zeros in on the major conundrums we as teachers face whether we are setting out to teach a qualitative class or a qualitative course sequence, or attempting to engineer the overall learning objectives for a degree program: defining what qualitative research is and is not, relating theory with practice, and utilizing specialized software in the learning of qualitative data analysis. She also includes the role teacher and student characteristics play in this integration of conceptualization and implementation. In doing so Hurworth asks important questions of what makes for an ideally prepared faculty member and student and what self-of-the-learner and teacher factors can come into consideration

when contemplating instructional design issues such as individual or team learning, the place of drills and exercises, assessing readiness for fieldwork, and establishing an overall rhythm of knowing and doing.

After establishing the gap and its importance in the contemporary landscape of teaching and learning qualitative research, Hurworth outlines her participatory observation of a number of instructors and classes. In these multi-site ethnographic investigations, Hurworth focuses not only on what transpires in the courses themselves, but also on the characteristics of teachers and learners, as well as the institutional contexts that can shape what happens in the classroom. These in-depth sketches of qualitative research being taught in the field showcase Hurworth's researching skills and deliver a useful array of case-based observations that can help us identify issues we all confront when teaching qualitative research. In reading the case studies I also felt a comforting sense that I am not the only one who struggles with which readings should be assigned, how to manage student activities, and what is the best way to assess students' productivity.

After presenting us with the review of the literature and the results of her case studies Hurworth devotes the rest of the body of the text to exploring a series of major concerns in teaching qualitative research successfully: the contextual factors shaping how qualitative research is taught, managing the relationship between theory and practice, determining the curriculum, assessing learning, managing student projects, and sharing the task of teaching. In each of these chapters Hurworth deftly lays out the issues and concludes each discussion with listings of the major lessons to be learned and prescriptions for improving practice. I found these lists of suggested recommendations quite insightful and useful in challenging my thinking in a number of these areas. My only quibble with these prescriptions is I would suggest the use of a more hedging style of presentation so the pronouncements would be worded in a form more in keeping with a qualitative research approach to reporting findings or results.

Hurworth concludes the body of her tome with a listing of the lessons learned from her research. This handy review helps readers to review the prescriptions in one manageable section and to provide a foundation for further reflection on where to go from here in terms of improving the teaching of qualitative research. Hurworth also helps us with taking these next steps by sharing a wealth of print and online resources broken down into general, disciplinary, and methodological sources.

Hurworth humbly acknowledges that her work only begins to open the door on this under-appreciated body of research and we have much work to do to better understand the teaching and learning of qualitative research and to improve the jobs we are doing. To this end I offer the following suggestions and examples in the spirit of identifying strategies and programs that have the potential to help us collectively improve the next generation of qualitative research teachers and learners:

1. **Focusing on Learning:** Although Hurworth focused on teaching and teachers of qualitative research I suggest a shift in focus from what professors should teach to what and how students learn is a critical movement qualitative research educators can embrace. By concentrating on what competencies qualitative researchers should master we can better construct the learning experiences and assessments for our students and ourselves. An important first step could be for the qualitative

- research community to come together to draft a set of basic and advanced competencies for qualitative researchers. In 2003 the Qualitative Research Consultants Association took a pioneering step by generating their useful guide entitled the Professional Competencies for Qualitative Research Professionals (<http://www.qrca.org/associations/6379/files/ProfComp.pdf>). To my knowledge no comparable list has been composed for academic qualitative researchers.
2. Considering New Learning Contexts: Hurworth focuses primarily on the traditional face-to-face classroom setting for teaching and learning qualitative research, but contemporary technologies and initiatives hold great promise to generate new learning environments and communities (see Chenail, 2004). Pioneering pedagogical efforts such as the United Kingdom's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme funded REQUALLO (Reusable Qualitative Learning Objects; <http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/REQUALLO.php>) hold great promise for generating new learning experiences for professors and their students alike.
 3. Incorporating Teaching into Doctoral Education and Training: Programs in organizations like the United States' Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>) have increased attention on the importance of mentoring doctoral students to become competent teachers. These efforts along with a renewed emphasis on the scholarship on teaching and learning should encourage more research and publishing on the teaching and learning of qualitative research.
 4. Make Faculty Development a Priority: Lifelong learning is a priority for qualitative research faculty members to keep abreast of new developments and to re-charge their scholarly interests. A number of universities have created nurturing qualitative interest groups and interdisciplinary programs such as
 - a. The University of Georgia (<http://www.coe.uga.edu/leap/qual/index.html>)
 - b. The University of Maryland (<http://www.cрге.umd.edu/research/qrig.html>)
 - c. The University of North Carolina – Charlotte (<http://education.uncc.edu/aqr/Default.htm>)
 - d. St. Louis University (<http://www.slu.edu/organizations/qrc/>)
 - e. Bournemouth University (<http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/cqr/index.html>)
 - f. The University of Toronto (<http://www.phs.utoronto.ca/qualmethod/>)
 - g. Duquesne University (<http://www.ciqr.duq.edu/>)
 - h. The University of Auckland (<http://www.business.auckland.ac.nz/comwebContent/sitemanager/index.cfm?fs=pgv&pageid=18666>)
 - i. McGill University (<http://mqhrg.mcgill.ca/>)
 - j. The University of Alberta (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/iqmq/>)
 - k. Syracuse University (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/iqmq/>)

These organizations bring faculty members together physically and virtually to enliven interest in qualitative research and to provide workshops, seminars, conferences, and some even offer graduate certificates to further faculty development:

- a. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
(http://nursing.unc.edu/lifelong/PDF/cert_qualrsch.pdf)
 - b. Nova Southeastern University
(http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/Graduate_Certificate_in_Qualitative_Research.html)
5. Mentor Beginning Qualitative Research Authors: We as faculty can only do so much in the confines of a one or two course sequence when it comes to helping beginning qualitative researchers to become competent published authors. Journal editors too have to be willing to help with the mentoring process in order to assist new authors in learning this craft (see Chenail et al., 2007). Such editorial systems require extensive allocation of resources, but the commitment can be a major step in helping the next generation of master the art of re-writing.

Hurworth's hope that we are entering an era of renewed interest in teaching and learning qualitative research may be coming to fruition. Books like Minichiello and Kottler's (2009) forthcoming text, *Qualitative Journeys: Student and Mentor Experiences with Research*, promise a fresh approach to learning qualitative research through the presentation of case studies of students learning qualitative research can help the next generation learn from the learning of others. If we are entering such an age, Rosalind Hurworth's book is wonderful place to learn where we have been as qualitative research educators and where we might be headed.

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