# Exploring Critical Events in an Inaugural Arts-Based Research Class through Ethnographic Mapping and Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches

Janet Richards
*University of South Florida*, jrichards@usf.edu

Steve Haberlin
*University of South Florida*, stevehaberlin@yahoo.com

# Exploring Critical Events in an Inaugural Arts-Based Research Class through Ethnographic Mapping and Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches

## Abstract

Arts-based research (ABR) employs the arts to explore the "experiences of researchers and the people they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). Acknowledgement of ABRs' potential for enhancing social science inquiry has gained momentum along with the development of new ABR methods courses. However, there is a lack of published studies that investigate what goes on in ABR classes (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Personal communication, The Qualitative Report 2018 Conference). In this inquiry we (Janet, course designer and instructor, and Steve, student and class assistant), employed ethnographic techniques to explore unexpected critical events that occurred in our inaugural ABR class. We wanted to discover why these problematic situations happened. We also hoped to learn how we might have anticipated and resolved these events before they became challenging. Similar to a bricolage process in which researchers cobble different modes of inquiry together, we interfaced ethnographic mapping with poetry-enriched narrative sketches to record and make sense of the data. We discovered some critical events resulted from circumstances outside of the classroom and other incidents were exacerbated because we did not attend to problems when they first developed.

## Keywords

Arts-Based Research (ABR) Methods Class, Critical Events, Ethnographic Perspectives, Mapping, Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches

## Creative Commons License

## Acknowledgements

# Exploring Critical Events in an Inaugural Arts-Based Research Class through Ethnographic Mapping and Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches

Janet C. Richards and Steven Haberlin
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA

*Arts-based research (ABR) employs the arts to explore the "experiences of researchers and the people they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). Acknowledgement of ABRs' potential for enhancing social science inquiry has gained momentum along with the development of new ABR methods courses. However, there is a lack of published studies that investigate what goes on in ABR classes (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Personal communication, The Qualitative Report 2018 Conference). In this inquiry we (Janet, course designer and instructor, and Steve, student and class assistant), employed ethnographic techniques to explore unexpected critical events that occurred in our inaugural ABR class. We wanted to discover why these problematic situations happened. We also hoped to learn how we might have anticipated and resolved these events before they became challenging. Similar to a bricolage process in which researchers cobble different modes of inquiry together, we interfaced ethnographic mapping with poetry-enriched narrative sketches to record and make sense of the data. We discovered some critical events resulted from circumstances outside of the classroom and other incidents were exacerbated because we did not attend to problems when they first developed. Keyword: Arts-Based Research (ABR) Methods Class, Critical Events, Ethnographic Perspectives, Mapping, Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches*

*Critical incidents are context specific "unplanned, unanticipated, and uncontrolled ... [and have] "impact and a profound effect on whoever experiences such an event" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 77)*

*Teachers bear "a share of the responsibility for classroom events and outcomes; students make their own contributions, influencing both their own actions and those of the teacher" (Manke, 2008, p. 7)*

Arts-based research (ABR) employs all forms of the arts to explore and understand the "experiences of researchers and the people they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). Acknowledgement of ABRs' potential for enhancing social science inquiry has gained momentum along with the development of new ABR methods courses. However, there is a lack of published research that investigates what goes on in ABR classes (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Personal communication, *The Qualitative Report* 2018 Conference). In this inquiry we (Janet, course designer and instructor, and Steve, student and class assistant), explored unexpected worrisome critical events that occurred in our inaugural ABR class. We were concerned and confused about these problematic situations and wanted to determine why they happened. We also hoped to learn how we might have anticipated and resolved these problems before they became

challenging. Thus, we took on the role of ethnographers in education who study human behavior in natural settings, such as classrooms (see Green & Bloome, 1997). With this situated perspective, our goal was to study problematic patterns of communication and behavior in our ABR community.

## Organizing and Making Sense of the Data

We were aware that the complexities of critical events are difficult to untangle through traditional research approaches (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). At the same time, the creative nature of ABR inspired us to document and study our critical event data through aesthetic modalities. Therefore, similar to a bricolage process in which researchers cobble together different modes of inquiry, we interfaced two innovative techniques to organize and make sense of what we perceived as critical incidents in our ABR class. First, using ethnographic archiving, a process of highlighting a phenomenon within a specific context and presenting it through artistic expression (Pink, 2007), we visually documented challenging moments in our ABR class on an ethnographic "critical event" map (Green, Sukauskaite, & Baker, 2011) (also see Lichtman, 2013). Then we authored poetry-enriched narrative sketches, a type of short story that allowed us to review the incidents that took place in our ABR class (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Webster & Mertova, 2007). This second process helped us consider our perceptions of the events, reflect on who or what triggered the events, learn in what ways our students and we responded to them, and figure out how we might have resolved these issues.

## Our Definition of Critical Events for this Inquiry

In this inquiry we defined a critical event as an unexpected, disturbing incident that occurred in the bounded space of our inaugural doctoral ABR class. We further characterized these incidents as:

1. Unforeseen problematic situations involving a student, students, instructor, or teaching assistant
2. Possibly the result of a student's personal issue
3. Often intertextual (i.e., connected across time; related phenomena)
4. Possibly linked to experiences outside the classroom
5. Having an effect on participants in the class
6. Sometimes deemed as critical only in hindsight (e.g., refer to critical event # on the Critical Event Map and in Narrative Sketch #1)
7. Possibly connected to some aspect of a teacher's role

(Definitions suggested in part by Webster & Mertova, 2007; Wood, 1992; Woods, 1985)

## Theoretical Perspectives Supporting the Inquiry

We informed the study through three related theoretical frameworks with the goal of understanding the critical events that took place in our ABR classroom. These perspectives were: (a) tenets of interactional ethnographic premises applied to education that focus on classroom observation with the aim of discerning verbal interactions of a newly formed group of participants, such as our ABR class (i.e., intertextual communication at the micro level; see Castanheira, Crawford, Green, & Dixon, 2001; Derrida, 1978; Woods, 1985); (b) interpretivism as a research approach that has the intent of deducing the meaning of human

behavior and posits behavior is closely linked to individuals' environment and their subjective perception of their environment (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Neuman, 2000), and; (c) the intertextual characteristics of classroom culture concerned with ways individuals act and react to each other in social contexts using "language and other semiotic systems to make meaning" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 330).

### Situating Ourselves and Our Students in the Inquiry

*Janet:* "Who we are as educators shapes the tenor of our classes and impacts how and what students learn" (Richards, 2011, p. 784). Therefore, as the designer and instructor of the inaugural ABR class I share my qualifications as a professor of ABR. I position myself as a professor of qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher, and music major with considerable training in voice performance and piano. Inherently, the arts are congruent with my creative worldview, which guides my research because art influences my epistemological beliefs about what constitutes knowledge. For these reasons I believed I had the qualifications to plan and teach the first ABR methods course offered in our college. Therefore, with high hopes and expectations for students' learning and wellbeing, and anticipating a perfect semester, I authored and e-mailed the following overly optimistic poem to Steve. Later, through our research, we learned my self-assurance contributed to some of the critical incidents that occurred.

*__Pleased with Myself__*
*Pleased with myself*
*When I think about the class*
*Smiling smugly to myself*
*In my looking glass*
*Can't think of anything*
*That might go wrong*
*I'm hip-hoppin' and dancing*
*A joyous, happy song*
*I devised the syllabus*
*I planned what tasks we'll do*
*All will be perfection*
*Trust me- it's true*
*Not worried at all*
*How this ABR class will go*
*The students will love it*
*Believe me-__I know!__*

But in retrospect, I didn't know. As Montaigne observed, "nothing is so firmly believed as that which we know least" (March, 1580, n.p.). I soon found it was naïve of me to expect the semester would proceed flawlessly. As Green and her colleagues caution, there are times when researchers "are confronted with a surprise or something that does not go as expected" (2011, p. 310).

---

**Note:** There are always ethical tensions in qualitative research connected to the confidentiality and privacy of study participants. Thus, in the following section Steve offers only a succinct overview of the eight students in the ABR class.

*Steve:* I also looked forward to the new ABR course and I was happy the eight students in the class were distinct and interesting. Therefore, after the first ABR session I wrote to Janet about my appreciation of the uniqueness of my fellow students.

> Wow, what a diverse, interesting group of people. Classmates from communications, music, literacy, special education, English as Second Language—and the varied personal interests: organic farming, glass-making, stand-up Hip-Hop poetry, process drama. I'm excited and honored about taking the first Arts-Based Research course at our university with this group. Furthermore, I think because this class is not a requirement and people are taking it to pursue their passions in the arts, to express their creativity, to "get better" at qualitative research means you have intrinsically motivated individuals coming together to collaborate, to share, to learn; powerful stuff.

However, I quickly discovered my dual position of ABR student and class assistant appeared to create some resentful feelings and competition among some classmates and me. As a result, throughout the entire semester I felt a bit uncomfortable and apprehensive.

## Methods

### Our Roles in the Inquiry

In this study we assumed the role of ethnographic participant observers (i.e., we studied individual and group behavior in a bounded system). Janet also served as instructor and Steve served as student/class assistant. As such, we were immersed in our ABR classroom life. Accordingly, with our emic insiders' position, we were able to observe the ABR students' communicative interactions with peers and with us for extended periods of time as well as each other's interfaces with students.

### Data Collection

Throughout the semester as we observed the sometimes-challenging dynamics in the class, we each wrote independent observation field notes (e.g.*,* Janet*: A student interrupted Steve's presentation tonight. I should have spoken up-taken charge; "Tonight I imagined perfection -But soon learned -Some things went in the opposite direction"; "My job is to make this course not about the arts but about arts- based research. Some in the class tonight said they prefer just art. What might I do? Have to meet every student's needs").* We also wrote e-mail messages to each other regarding our perceptions of class events (e.g., Steve: *"I felt defeated when those students spoke out about my presentation when I was speaking. I thought about the incident all the way home").* In addition, we received and reviewed e-mail messages from students (e.g., *"Do we have a place in academia where we can thrive and serve as artists and researchers?").* Other data were students' original poetry included in their email messages (e.g., *"I'm lost in this class -Thought we'd showcase our art -Instead it's ABR -Where I'm not very smart").*

### Archiving the Data through Mapping

Mapping is an innovative way to identify individual's patterned ways of perceiving, believing, and acting within and across the events of everyday life in a bounded system (Green & Castanheira, 2012). Since this definition fit our ABR class inquiry, we were drawn

to mapping as a way to archive critical events. Mapping also served as a multisensory, unique, artistic method to document our ABR class data. Moreover, we found that mapping crosses disciplinary boundaries (Lichtman, 2013) and has been employed in education. For example, Dixon and colleagues (1992) used sketch maps coupled with text notations of classroom incidents.

There is no set rule for how many incidents documented on a map provide sufficient data (Butterfield, Borgen, Amudson, Maglio, 2005; Flanagan, 1954). Consequently, in the following map we documented seven critical incidents we both agreed were most disconcerting over the course of the semester. As shown on the Map Legend (top left on the map below, we accompany these seven critical incidents with the precursors to the events as well as study participants' (i.e., students', Janet's, and Steve's) reactions to those events. We designate the precursors and reactions to the seven events by arrows to the numbered boxes that surround the map. For example, Critical Event #1 (see **START**) is at the top left in the map and the precursor and reaction to Critical Event #1 (designated by an arrow) are displayed directly above Critical Event #1. Note that Critical Events #1, #2, and #5 portray connections.

## Mapping the Critical Event Data

**Legend**

P - Precursor

R - Reaction

**Critical Event #1**

P: Occurred previous to class

R: Janet took no action

**Critical Event #2**

P: Janet did not alter the syllabus to meet the needs of some students who had no previous experience with qualitative research methods.

R: Janet revised the assignments listed on the syllabus.

**Critical Event #3**

P: Janet asked Steve to obtain consent forms for students' participation in a study.

R: Some students resisted signing the form. Eventually all students signed.

Critical Event #1 - some students had no qualitative experience

START

Critical Event #2 - syllabus too confusing for some students

Critical Event #3 - Obtaining consent forms from students

Critical Event #4 – Steve's presentation was confusing – some students disagreed

Critical Event #7 - some students suggest we share our personal arts artifacts weekly

Critical Event #6 - visit to CAC

Critical Event #5 - some students upset over presentation

**Critical Event #7**

P: Some highly artistic students wanted to discuss and make art rather than do arts-based research. They suggested we share personal art each week.

R: Janet agreed to this suggestion but sharing took too much time and some students complained privately to one another.

**Critical Event #6**

P: Janet did not prepare students for the harsh conditions depicted in the arts installation.

R: Students and Janet feel uncomfortable.

**Critical Event #5**

P: Janet did not recognize how anxious some students were over their approaching ABR presentations.

R: Steve calms the students and says we will help them.

**Critical Event #4**

P: Janet asked Steve to model an ABR presentation without helping him prepare for the presentation.

R: Students appeared perplexed. Some students unfamiliar with qualitative research shouted out, "You are not describing crystallization correctly." This remark upset Steve and from then on the male students in the class formed a close bond with Steve.

### Making Sense of Critical Events through Poetry-Enriched Narrative Sketches

Making sense of critical events requires researchers to put the incidents in the context of where and how the event occurred, and to also try to identify prior conditions and consequences (Eisner 1991; Stokrocki, 1997; Wood, 2012). Thus, following our mapping of critical events, in the second stage of analysis we turned to poetry-enriched narrative sketches to gain deeper insights about the data. Narrative sketches are a type of short story that exemplifies the human-centered qualities of an event as seen "through the eyes of the researcher in collaboration with the people involved in the stories" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 87) (also see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Hence, narrative sketches align with our post-modern/post structural stance in which we honor study participants' personal experiences. We also were aware of the arts-based focus of this inquiry. Therefore, we enriched the narrative sketches with self-reflective poetry as an alternative form of data representation. Reflection through poetry captures human beings heightened feelings and tensions and reveals deep emotions (see Kinsella, 2006; Wood, 2012).

*Janet: Critical Event #1*: Week One

**Big Surprise**
*In the first class we introduced ourselves*
*And talked about the class*
*No hint of trouble at that time*
*No worries came to pass*
*But then I got a big surprise*
*Something I never considered*
*Some students had never studied qualitative methods before*
*And that's not what I had figured*

So what was my response**? Nothing!** I ignored the obvious solution. I should have immediately accommodated the students who had little understanding of qualitative research. But, I created that syllabus and *loved* that syllabus and I didn't want to change it. I had a bad case of denial**.** Later that week, in response to my lack of response, one of the students who was unfamiliar with qualitative research composed an emotional poem to explain discomfort in the class.

*Struggle in this new environment*
*People know nothing about me*
*Feel uncomfortable*
*Confined to a chair, hiding behind my laptop, taking notes*
*Reservations whether class can operate as a community.*
*Highly creative like me does not mean I know about ABR*
*Tension is building within me*
*Feel the pain and frustration*
*Ideas and people collide in this space*
*Resistance, fear, uncertainty permeate the room.*
*Where are we going?*

Janet: Yet, even after reading this student's poem, my over-confidence and hubris kept me from altering the syllabus. As the semester progressed, I would regret lack of action on my part. Even Steve commented on the excessive rigor depicted in the syllabus. He wrote:

*Who am I*
*To speak my mind*
*Perhaps to risk offense?*
*Who am I*
*To question why*
*The syllabus is so dense?*
*Who am I*
*To give advice*
*When I'm not particularly aesthetic?*
*Who am I*
*To voice my views?*
*I might sound pathetic*

*Steve*: I recall e-mailing Janet, regarding the syllabus draft. Cognizant of the post-structuralist, Foucault's notion about the power structure inherent within all relationships (1980) I knew I had to move delicately, not wanting to offend her. I simply referred to the syllabus as rather "ambitious." Secretly, I wanted to shout: "***You must realize that this is too much work for Ph. D. students taking three or four other classes; they will never finish it all! Sometimes, less is more.*** "But I did no such thing. I kept quiet - who was I to speak up?

<u>*Janet: Critical Event #2*</u>: Week Three: The On-Going Syllabus Problem

*So to me everything was still OK*
*In my lovely ABR life*
*I actually thought the previous event*
*Was not a portent of ongoing strife*
*But then at the end of the second class*
*The event #1 student screamed*
*"I don't understand this damn syllabus," the student yelled*
*Oh no- there went my dream!*

I should have recognized the syllabus issue would not go away. This student didn't understand the syllabus because of a lack of qualitative research courses, and I had ignored his instructional needs. Instead, I continued to hold on to my ABR dream. To show continued frustration about class assignments, he wrote:

*I'm in a box, crystal box,*
*Shattered box, a jagged reflection*
*I'm looking out, busting out*
*Hear me shout, "To hell with tradition!"*
*I've spent my whole life*
*Fitting into the spaces*
*You said I could have*
*So I'll be damned*
*If I get in another hold*
*Another bind, another box*

Just as Steve noted, the syllabus was too demanding for students with no qualitative research experience. This oversight on my part contributed to an intertextual (i.e., connected) relationship across time, linking critical events #1 and #2 (and eventually, critical event #5).

In a long overdue response, in week three of the class I composed and sent an e-mail message to all students.

> Hi, it is necessary for us to alter our assignment schedule. The syllabus is a new one. We learn together as we go through this first course iteration. Students in the class have varying understandings and expertise in qualitative research. We are all learners in this class with diverse ideas. Thus, it is my responsibility to make things easier and more attainable for students. Therefore, I have posted a new schedule for student presentations that I hope will prove accommodating and student- centered. I will meet with any student who seeks guidance.

Now, when I read what I wrote to my students I think I proposed some good solutions to the intertextual syllabus event. However, my reaction occurred too late and I think I tried to justify my behavior to my students.

*Steve: Critical Event #3*: The Consent Form: Week Five

When Janet and I decided to conduct an inquiry to learn about the critical events occurring in the ABR class we knew we had to obtain study participants' consent. Typically, this process is routine. Earlier, Janet and I decided it might be better for me to conduct this necessary procedure rather than Janet, who, as the instructor assigned student grades. We thought in this way students would not feel pressured to participate in the study because Janet would not know who was in the inquiry until the semester ended. However, as I began to discuss the consent procedure, a student who had been in previous qualitative classes with Janet yelled out, "You better watch what you sign because she'll (Janet) write about you!" I summed it up in this poem I sent to Janet.

> *Look out or she'll write about you*
> *The good, the bad, the ugly too*
> *Look out or she'll write about you*
> *If you give consent that's what she'll do*

Although this individual appeared to make the comment in jest, it caused some students to become wary about joining the study. Might they think we only wanted them as study participants? In retrospect, Janet believed she should have distributed the forms since she could have explained why researchers conduct research. In the end, all of the students decided to join the study. But, here again, we could have handled the student consent form issue better through more communication.

*Steve: Critical Event #4*: Week Six: Modeling How to Present a Mini-Research Project

Janet was concerned some students were worried about their end of semester ABR presentation in which they first were to devise research questions, and then include theoretical frameworks undergirding the research, collect and analyze ABR data, and provide discoveries and a discussion section. Therefore, in mid-semester she asked me to present my

ABR inquiry students might use as a model. I had already collected data and prepared my presentation so that was fine with me. Yes, I get the presentation done, but I opened myself up to student criticisms. I employed a crystallization approach to provide multiple perspectives on a phenomenon (Ellingson, 2009). In the middle of my presentation, a few students who had probably never bt bringing different forms of data together (Ellington, 2009) engaged in crystallization completed this type of assignment, commented, "That's not crystallization."

These students continued to argue and disagree with my data analysis approach. I justified my actions, rebutting that I believed as researchers, not artists, we must provide discourse on our data, and make sense of it, including ABR data. Breathing deeply, I asked that I be allowed to continue my presentation and stumbled through the remaining Power Point slides. Then I wrote:

*Presenting first*
*Was the worst*
*I felt like*
*An open target*
*Like a scout*
*Full of doubt*
*I was in the margins*
*Students looked at me*
*'What did they see?*
*You already know the answer*
*Oh S… , Oh Hell*
*Me- not doing very well*

Driving home, my stress level high, I certainly could relate to notions that research assistants face many challenges. I questioned what these students' motive was for "sabotaging" my presentation; other classmates seemed to appreciate my mini inquiry. Perhaps they viewed me as one research assistant wrote, "a research assistant is like nothing. They have no respect, no reverence, and no fidelity. They act like they know everything. They only show off" (Yalçin, Özoglu, & Dönmez, 2016, p. 26).

*Janet:* This event was disturbing for Steve and I take responsibility. I should have stepped in and offered a comprehensive definition of crystallization. I also should have spoken privately with students who disturbed Steve's presentation. I wondered why these students were disturbed by Steve's presentation. "Often interactions outside the classroom shape interactions inside the classroom" (Atkinson, Buck, & Hunt, 2009, p. 240).

*Steve: Critical Event #5*: Week 11: The Eruption

The ABR presentations were due in three weeks. As the class ended, "Noah" (a pseudonym) covered his face with his hands, shaking his head from side to side. "Are you alright?" asked a classmate.

"Nah, I'm not alright," "Noah" replied. Then he yelled out, "I don't understand what we are supposed to do. I don't get this ABR assignment!"

*Like a boiling volcano*
*The syllabus student erupted*
*"I don't understand!" he screamed*

*And our class was interrupted*
*No wonder this student was so perturbed*
*He wanted to do his best*
*But we had discounted his instructional needs*
*No wonder he was stressed*
*So then I said*
*"Man, let's figure it out*
*I'll send you my presentation slides"*
*And Janet said*
*"I'll help you too*
*We'll be your learning guides"*

<u>Steve</u>: Janet's worries about students not having completed a prerequisite qualitative research course came to haunt her again since this frustrated student had not studied qualitative methods. As the critical event map shows, critical events #1 and #2, now demonstrated another intertextual relationship (see #5 on the map).

Knowing it was my job to help students, I quickly offered to review the project requirements. "I'll send you one of my projects so you can see what is supposed to be on each slide," I assured him. But he didn't appear comforted. *"Janet is a great teacher, I love this class, but I just don't understand what we're supposed to do on this project,"* he told me.

Later, he e-mailed another poem to Janet that highlighted his continued conflict between wanting to engage in the arts to nurture his significant talents and the requirements of the ABR course, which focused on arts-based research.

*I won't be complicit*
*In shutting my own self down*
*Please, God, be explicit*
*Don't tell me you're now too proud*
*I've spent my whole life fitting into the spaces*
*You said I could have*
*So I'll be damned if I get in another hold*
*Another bind, another box*

In response, Janet drafted and sent a detailed description of each step of the project, noting exactly what was to appear on each Power Point slide, and e-mailed the plan to students. But as she said later, *"Too late – I needed to react to this problem early on. Now my non reaction has caused another tense situation."*

<u>Janet: Critical Event #6</u>: Week 12: This Art is Ugly!

*Art is in the eye of the beholder*
*It certainly was for this class*
*"Ugly," some said*
*"Not pretty at all"*
*But the docent let it pass*
*As the instructor I had not prepared*
*The students for what they would view*
*No pretty flowers, or abstract art*
*No mountains, or skies of blue*
*Instead the theme was desecration*

> *A ruined earth revealed*
> *Raw, disturbing, gritty scenes*
> *Predicted earth's fate was sealed*
> *Then in our next class discussion*
> *About our museum excursion*
> *Steve and a few students argued a lot*
> *Revealing their opposing versions*

The Contemporary Arts Center at our university constructed a new, themed installation (i.e., a complete unified experience) that highlighted artists' provocative ideas about the desecration of our planet. The installation illuminated how humans thoughtlessly extract natural resources from the earth to turn them into consumable goods and included etchings, digital prints, large murals, and "found art." One darkened room displayed an authentic, disturbing film of men working in depths of 1,000 meters in a now closed mine in Namibia, Africa. As we observed the film, we heard loud grinding sounds coming from underground vehicles.

<u>*Steve*</u>: The following week in class a few students and I engaged in a heated discussion related to the film - an "underground hell called Tsumeb Mines." Some shouted out that the men worked like slaves. I offered my opinion, "*Maybe the men wanted to work there. Perhaps they had no other place to work.*"

I also said, *"I wonder whether any of the miners featured in the documentary enjoyed that type of work."*

Some students commented, *"You are enacting "white privilege." How'd you like to work in the dark all day?" "What gives you the right to decide what these men want?"*

I began to debate with them and since we were getting nowhere some students and Janet helped defuse the situation by changing the topic.

<u>*Janet*</u>**:** Here again I think I did too little too late. I needed to defuse this situation. Thinking back, I might have suggested we engage in a "Quick Write" about the topic and then share ideas in small groups. I also should have reminded the students at our first class meeting that exchanging ideas is important, but we all must offer our opinions respectfully and politely.

<u>*Janet: Event # 7*: Week 13: Let's Share the Art We Love</u>

> *There was also*
> *An on-going semester divide*
> *Where some students*
> *Wanted ABR to slide*
> *They'd rather create art*
> *Share personal treasures*
> *Than learn to do ABR*
> *And so I felt pressured*
> *Other students complained*
> *And they were correct*
> *Sharing our art*
> *Soon lost its effect*

Throughout the semester, some highly creative students wanted to engage in artistic pursuits rather than learn how to conduct arts-based research. It seemed their attitude was "*art for arts sake*."

(*Janet: From my notes*): Just before mid-semester, at the suggestion of one student, I agreed we would all bring a personally meaningful art object to share each week. The students' art treasures were all different-a T-shirt from a rock concert; a St. Patrick's prayer card; a box that when opened reflected the viewer; three pictures of Hispanic women that were torn from a conference program; a sword holder from Japan; visual art handed down from a deceased parent; original music composed by a student in class; handcrafted glasswork created by another student. These objects illuminated how the arts connect to our life experiences. And certainly, these occasions were initially enlightening.

<u>*Steve*</u>: There is no doubt viewing and appreciating art can be a powerful therapeutic tool (Bennington, et al., 2016). Certainly, all of us found this activity helped us learn a lot about one another. Sharing art in conjunction with past experiences and memories can bring people together and improve psychological wellbeing (Chiang, et al., 2010). Some of the artifacts shared were fascinating. But the activity consumed precious instructional time, lasting sometimes an hour or more in a 3-hour class. We needed this time to study arts-based scholarship, examine exemplar articles, and practice ABR data analysis. In retrospect, Janet now recognizes, her willingness to please students contributed to the class spending too much time on this pursuit and not enough time on how to conduct arts-based research.

## Limitations of The Inquiry

Prior to our Discussion Section we share the limitations of the inquiry. One limitation centers on our multiple roles in the study that give rise to possible researcher bias (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this inquiry I (Janet) served as a researcher, data collector, data analyst, and a professor who was preoccupied with the achievements of my students and the success of the ABR course I developed. Steve was a student, class assistant, and researcher. Certainly, because of our various functions in this inquiry we were not value free although we made sure to critically reflect and share our possible biases with each other throughout the semester. Nonetheless, we were not detached from this inquiry; we were invested participants in the study.

Another limitation is as researchers we often see things we want to see and hear what we want to hear. Who we are impacts our perceptions and beliefs. Hermeneutic principles explain in all probability our professional background, epistemology, personal experiences, strong involvement in the course, and beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews influenced our interpretations of the data. A strong possibility exists others might come to different conclusions about their meaning.

A final limitation centers on our use of narrative sketches to provide context for the seven critical events we documented. Some scholars continue to question whether narrative is empirical data because it is susceptible to interpretations (Kim, 2015). We acknowledge, "narratives are interpretative, and in turn, require interpretation" (Riessmann, 1993, p. 22). With these limitations in mind, we reflect on what we learned in the following section.

## Our Discoveries

In this study we connected ethnographic mapping with poetry-enriched narrative sketches to explore and construct knowledge about critical events that occurred in our

inaugural ABR classroom. We believe the approach we took to archive and study the data demonstrates the value of employing different modes of inquiry to capture and make sense of complex phenomena, such as critical events. The visual images we archived on the ethnographic map illuminated patterns of data that allowed us to study relationships among the precursors and responses to critical events and highlighted connections, causal links, and commonalities among incidents (see Meinert & Kapferer, 2015; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Thus, mapping data reveals how graphic representations highlight incidents researchers might explore further "within a particular analysis and across a series of inter-connected analyses" (Green et al., 2011, p. 318). A case in point is when we turned to the second phase of our inquiry, we discovered the mapped data provided a visual heuristic that helped us author poetry-enriched narrative sketches. Moreover, the incorporation of poetry prompted study participants' emotions and feelings to emerge that included hubris, anxieties, doubts, uncertainties, and opinions.

Combining ethnographic mapping coupled with poetry-enriched narrative sketches allowed us to share our sometimes parallel, sometimes different assumptions and viewpoints with each other. Therefore, we were able to enhance our reflexivity, and make meaning, which is central to arts-based, ethnographic, and narrative explorations (Green et al., 2011). As we reflected on the critical incidents, we learned how we, instructor and student/class assistant, contributed to the events that occurred in our ABR class, such as events #1, #2, and #5. Furthermore, cobbling two different modes of data collection illuminated in what ways we occasionally had different perceptions of how we contributed to these situations. For example, Steve recognized early on that the original syllabus was too difficult for some students while I (Janet) disregarded his concerns. With considerable practical experience and a well-structured syllabus in hand, I (Janet) felt confident and prepared to teach the course, but the inclusion of some students with no background in qualitative research thwarted my plans. Thus, I learned that experiences, resources, and needs of students differ rather than assuming "students are all the same" (Misra & Lundquist 2017, n.p.). In the same way, Steve was distressed by some peers' comments in response to his ideas about the Contemporary Art installation. Yet my (Janet's) initial perception was that students were engaged in a worthwhile debate. Consequently, in addition, we consider this inquiry as a type of self-study of our teaching practices and professional attitudes and perceptions.

The ABR students' reactions to the art center installation also helped us appraise our pedagogy. While some students appreciated the exhibitions, a few missed the instructional purpose—to explore how artists conveyed meaning and communicated complex ideas. Research shows student preparation for a field trip can significantly improve learning (Kisiel, 2006). Therefore, from now on, we will make sure we know the theme of an art installation and share our understandings with ABR students.

We also learned the need to make clear to our ABR students the differences between *the arts* and *arts-based research*. Specifically, art becomes research when arts practices are communicated as inquiry (Fendler & Hernández-Hernandez, 2013). Consequently, while learning to appreciate the arts is certainly beneficial, rather than simply talking about, and sharing art, we needed to have spent more time helping students use artistic processes, such as dance, music, narrative, poetry, and visual arts, and the like to collect and interpret data and to understand arts-based research. According to Barone & Eisner (2012), "ABR is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry **process** and the research text" (p. 96).

In summary, in this inquiry we were also informed by three intertwined philosophical views (interactional ethnographic tenets; interpretivism, and; the intertextual characteristics of classroom culture) that helped us understand the critical events that took place in our ABR context. These philosophical ideas along with mapping interfaced with poetry-enriched

narrative sketches provided us with new insights, appreciation, and understandings about the power and consequences of critical classroom events and how we (Janet and Steve) contributed to them by not listening to our students.

## References

Atkinson, M., Buck, R., Hunt, A. (2009) Sociology of the college classroom: Applying sociological theory at the classroom level. *Teaching Sociology,* 37, 233–244.

Barone, T. (2001). Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(7), 24-28.

Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (2012). *Arts-based research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Bennington, R., Backos, A., Harrison, J. Etherington, R. & Carolan, R. (2016). Art therapy in art museums: Promoting social connectedness and psychological well-being of older adults. *The Arts in Psychotherapy, 49*, 34-43.

Bloome, D., & Egan-Roberson, A. (1993). The social construction of intertextuality in reading and writing lessons. *Reading Research Quarterly, 28*(4), 304-333.

Butterfield, L, Borgen, W., Amudson, N., & Maglio, A. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954–2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research*, *5*(4), 475-497.

Cahnmann-Taylor, M. & Sigesmund, R. (2008). *Arts-based research in education; Foundations for practice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Castanheira, M. L., Crawford, T., Dixon, C. N., & Green, J. L. (2001). Interactional ethnography: An approach to studying the social construction of literate practices. *Linguistics and Education, 11*(4), 353-400.

Chiang, H. Chu, H. Chang, M. Chung, C. Chen, H. & Chiou, K. (2010). The effects of reminiscence therapy on psychological well-being, depression and loneliness among the institutionalized aged. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 25*, 380-388.

Connelly, M. & Clandinin, D. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published in 1967)

Dixon, C. de la Cruz, E., Green, J., Lin, L., & Brandts, L. (1992). Do you see what we see? The referential and intertextual nature of classroom life. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, *27*(2), 29-36.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* New York, NY: Macmillan.

Ellingson, L. (2009). *Engaging crystallization in qualitative research*. Washington, D.C.: Sage Publications.

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, *51*(4), 327-358.

Fendler, R., & Hernández-Hernández, F. (2013). What does research mean for fine arts students? In *1st Conference on Arts-Based and Artistic Research: Critical reflections on the intersection of art and research* (p. 227). Barcelona, Spain.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977.* New York, NY: Pantheon.

Green, J., & Bloome, D. (1997). Ethnography & ethnographers in education: A situated perspective. In J. Flood, & S. B. Heath (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts* (pp. 1-46). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Green, J., & Castanheira, M. L. (2012). Exploring classroom life and student learning. In *Understanding Teaching and Learning* (pp. 53-65). Rotterdam, NY: Sense Publishers.

Green, J., Sukauskaite, A., & Baker, B. (2011). Ethnography as epistemology: An introduction to educational ethnography. In J Waring, R. Coe, & L Hidges (Eds.), *Research methods and methodologies in education* (pp. 309-321). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Kim, J. (2015). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kinsella, A. (2006). Poetic resistance: Juxtaposing personal and professional discursive constructions in a practice context. Retrieved from http://jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/viewFile/16994/15796

Kisiel, J. (2006). Making field trips work. *Science Teacher, 73*(1), 46-48.

Knowles, J. G., & Cole, A. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.

Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Manke, M. (2008). *Classroom power relations: Understanding student-teacher interaction.* New York, NY: Routledge.

McNiff, S. (2008). Art-based research. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*, (pp. 29-40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Meinert, L., & Kapferer, B. (Eds.). (2015). *In the event: Toward an anthropology of generic moments*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Miles, B. M. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Misra, J., & Lundquist, J. (2017, June 15). Key factors in successful student mentoring. *Inside Higher Ed.* Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2017/06/15/how-individual-members-well-their-institutions-should-mentor-students

Montaigne, M. (1580). *The complete essays.* France.

Neuman, W. L. (2000). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Pink, S. (Ed.). (2007). *Visual interventions: Applied visual anthropology* (Vol. 4). Berghahn Books.

Richards, J. C. (2011). "Every word is true": Stories of our experiences in a qualitative research course. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(3), 782-819. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol16/iss3/9

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis* (Vol. 30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stokrocki, M. (1997). Qualitative forms of research methods. In S. La Pierre, & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Research methods and methodologies for art education* (pp. 33-56). Reston, VA: NAEA.

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wood, D. (1992). *The power of maps*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Wood, J. (2012). *Transformation through journal writing: The art of self-reflection for the helping professions*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Woods, P. (1985). *Critical events in teaching and learning*. New York, NY: Rutledge

Yalçin, M., Özoglu, E. A., & Dönmez, A. (2016). Metaphoric perceptions of academic staff about the concept of research assistant. *Egitim ve Bilim*, *41*(185), 19-32.

## Author Note

Janet Richards is a Professor of Literacy and Qualitative Methods at the University of South Florida/Tampa. Her forthcoming book with Wolff-Michael Roth as second Editor is entitled, *Empowering Students as Self-Directed Learners of Qualitative Research Methods: Transformational Practices for Instructors and Students* (Brill/Sense Publishers, The Netherlands). Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: jrichards@usf.edu.

Steve Haberlin is a doctoral candidate in the elementary education program at the University of South Florida. His research agenda focuses on teacher education, instructional supervision, and the teaching and enactment of qualitative research methods, including arts-based research. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: stevehaberlin@yahoo.com.

## Article Citation

Richards, J. C., & Haberlin, S. (2019). Exploring critical events in an inaugural arts-based research class through ethnographic mapping and poetry-enriched narrative sketches. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(8), 1930-1945. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss8/8