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Teaching and Learning Qualitative Inquiry Online and Impacts on Family Life

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Abstract

This study uses letters-to-self and a group interview to integrate the experiences of two groups of participant-researchers—(1) a professor of qualitative inquiry and two of his doctoral students in an online qualitative research class and (2) this same professor and his family. The specific purpose of this study for the first group, comprised of the professor and his two former doctoral students, was to jointly explore perceptions of teaching and learning qualitative inquiry in a formal university setting as well as these students' perceptions of the impacts that their entry into full-time doctoral study has had on their family life. The specific purpose for the second group, comprised of the professor and his family, was to jointly explore perceptions of teaching and learning qualitative inquiry in a family setting. It was found that a richer understanding of the dynamics of teaching and learning qualitative inquiry amidst the dynamics of family life emerged from this study and will hopefully lead to further explorations of this complex phenomena among professors, students, and families.

Keywords

Auto-Ethnography, Family Research, Learning Qualitative Research, Online Learning, Teaching Qualitative Research

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Teaching and Learning Qualitative Inquiry Online and Impacts of Family Life

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Introduction

“We are researchers who write, not gifted writers who can indulge in writing for its own sake.” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 266).

This study is based upon the perceptions and reflections of a professor and his family as well as two doctoral students. The doctoral students were enrolled in a Ph.D. cohort online program at a medium size university in Northeastern United States while the family members of the professor were co-researchers of a previous article upon which this current one is partially based (Bernauer, Bernauer, & Bernauer, 2017).

Regarding the first part of the title (“teaching and learning qualitative inquiry”), while the two doctoral students and professor worked in a formal online setting, the family members

and professor worked collaboratively using qualitative inquiry in a more natural home setting. Regarding the second part of the title (“impacts on family life”), there existed nuanced differences between the two groups of participants. Whereas the group comprised of the instructor and family explored impacts of their new and sometimes uncomfortable roles as collaborative researchers, the group comprised of the two doctoral students experienced change in family life primarily due to their entrée into full-time doctoral study. While this overlap of professor-students and professor-family makes for a more complex study, we thought it was of value to explore how these two lines of inquiry converge and to consider how the unique nature of this inquiry might contribute new perspectives regarding both family research as well as teaching and learning qualitative inquiry.

While Jim served in the role of both professor and family member, the two doctoral students (Jen and Becca) and the two family members (Mary Pat and Patrick) were full co-researchers serving as both informants and also as collaborators for analyzing, interpreting, and writing up the study. This combination of students (who are also spouses and parents) and professor and family was envisioned to offer a potentially rich and unique perspective on teaching and learning qualitative inquiry. It was conjectured that readers would find that this study would facilitate increased understanding and new insights regarding qualitative inquiry in both academic and family settings.

Literature Review

As noted above, this study focused on the teaching and learning of qualitative inquiry in an online doctoral classroom and the impacts of qualitative inquiry on family life. The current literature regarding online qualitative research focuses largely on instructor experiences, rather than on the graduate student experiences. Franco (2019, p. 182) specifically examined the teaching of qualitative research in a doctoral program and documented through autoethnography her transition from lecture-style, passive teaching techniques to those that were more active and student centered. Cooper, Chenail, and Fleming (2012) in their meta-analysis of students’ experiences learning qualitative research found an overlapping interrelationship among cognitive, affective, and experiential dimensions (p. 7). This finding supports the notion that learning (and therefore teaching) simply cannot be confined or defined solely in terms of cognitive or behavioral learning theory. Regarding the impact of family dynamics on graduate student learning, Blackmon and Major (2012, p. 80) found that interactions can be passive or active as seen when families allow study time to be quiet and to also provide encouragement through actions. Garner (2008) also supports the importance of family as an “influential role in the student preparation for degree programs and their experience in it” (p. 127). Outside of academic settings, Bernauer et al. (2017) used qualitative techniques within a family setting to investigate a student’s recalled experiences of caring in teaching and the implications such experiences may have for teacher preparation programs. Though the emphasis of this study was not on the qualitative research techniques, but rather the topic of caring, this study does point to the potential positive impact that qualitative research techniques can have on family interactions and relationships.

The current state of literature on qualitative inquiry and family dynamics points to a need for greater study of how doctoral students themselves experience learning about qualitative inquiry in an online setting and how the transition into full-time doctoral study impacts family life. Furthermore, an analysis of how qualitative inquiry itself might impact family dynamics, as was alluded to in the Bernauer et al. (2017) study, is needed. The experiences of doctoral students and families need to be told, analyzed, and shared. One research technique that supports the telling of personal stories, as viewed through a particular experiential or cultural lens, is autoethnography. Such a research paradigm aims to provide a

better understanding of life's experiences through self-reflection as narrated by the participants (Lee, 2008). Though autoethnographic research has been criticized because it involves story-telling through recollection, which may be fragmented and not an exact representation of the complete experience, Muncey (2005, pp. 2-3) believed that the use of autoethnographic research permits a broader lens with which to examine cultures and the historical processes that form them than do other qualitative research techniques.

Methods

As noted in the introduction, this study sought to achieve a two-fold purpose. Firstly, this study sought to gain a better understanding of how doctoral students experience learning about qualitative inquiry in an online setting and how the transition into full-time doctoral study impacts family life. Secondly, this study sought to examine how qualitative inquiry can be directly employed within a natural family setting to foster greater understanding and care for family members. Though seemingly different, these two purposes were united into one study, because they shared an underlying focus on qualitative inquiry and family dynamics and the co-researchers believed that the results from each part would enrich reader and researcher understanding of the potential applications of qualitative inquiry.

Given this study's dual purpose, two distinct data collection methods were employed. The professor-student group used an auto-ethnographic approach for generating data, while the professor-family group used a semi-structured group interview process to generate data, as it felt like a more natural fit. Regarding the methodology employed by the professor-student group, it was thought that "letters to self" (see Muncey, 2005) offered a direct window for collaboratively exploring perceptions and attitudes while granting each participant-researcher the independence to reflect and write based upon their own experiences and insights. These "letters to self" were made available to all participant-researchers for review and comment since we thought that this practice would promote credibility through collaborative member checking. Furthermore, "when researchers do *autoethnography*, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 8). For part one of this study, which included the professor and doctoral students, the research participants were asked to examine the personal and familial impact of learning about qualitative inquiry through the lens of an online doctoral student. For part two of this study, which included the professor and his family members, the research participants were asked to examine the impact of using qualitative research techniques within a natural setting through the lens of a family member. This two-pronged approach to studying the impact of qualitative inquiry on students and families was found to enrich understanding, as opposed to confounding the findings, and attests to the flexibility of qualitative inquiry.

The following research questions were derived by the participant-researchers and were used to guide this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do doctoral students and instructors experience learning/teaching qualitative research in an online classroom setting?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the impact of becoming a full-time, online doctoral student on family life, including relationships within the family, new allocations of responsibilities, and any other impacts?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do family members experience learning/teaching about qualitative research in a family setting, as it relates to caring in education?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Do family members recommend employing the practice of qualitative research in other areas of concern?

Results

Part I: Professor and Doctoral Students

Letters to self were used to collect the data in part one of this study. What follows are the interview prompts (and their corresponding research questions), as well as the reflective letters that each participant-researcher wrote in response.

Interview Question 1 (RQ1): How would you describe your experience learning/teaching qualitative research in our online classroom setting?

Becca's Response

In Fall 2016, I took my first qualitative research class as a doctoral student. From my previous studies, I was somewhat familiar with various research designs, particularly action research, as I had completed a comprehensive action research project as part of my master's program several years prior. As I began learning about qualitative inquiry, I recognized some underlying connections between it and action research and so I was immediately drawn to it.

I really appreciated that qualitative research seeks to answer questions like "how" and "why." There are certain phenomena in life that numbers and scientific inquiry cannot explain and qualitative inquiry fills this important research need. I also found the nonlinear and iterative process of qualitative research to be quite fascinating. By nature, I am analytical and logical. I like order and routine. But life is all too often disorganized and illogical, and we must simply embrace that! Having a research design that can accommodate reality and its unpredictable nuances is not only exciting, but also necessary. For me, the flexible nature of qualitative inquiry was so reassuring, since there is comfort in knowing that such research can evolve as the study progresses. Jen (see below) describes this comfort as "freeing" and I too can identify with this feeling. I grew to quickly appreciate that qualitative inquiry mirrors real life. As we respond moment-by-moment to the events around us, qualitative research responds to the very ebb and flow of the inquiry process. The notion of "multiple realities" is another element I found quite interesting. The fact that qualitative research embraces these multiple realities and does not attribute divergent outcomes to some source of error, but rather the simultaneous presence of numerous explanations (Guba, 1981), in my eyes, allows for a more comprehensive view of truth or truths.

Among the various types of qualitative inquiry, I was especially drawn to phenomenology. By profession I am a teacher. As such, I view education largely as a humanistic avocation, where caring for students, individualizing the learning experience, and presenting relevant, practical learning opportunities is of highest priority. In humanism, each individual matters, and in phenomenology, each person's story matters. Like Jen mentions in her letter below, the humanistic emphasis of phenomenology deeply resonated with me.

One element that I must address as I write about my learning experiences is the virtual context through which they occurred. Learning about qualitative research in the online setting was a wonderful pedagogical fit for me. I am driven, self-directed, deeply reflective, and very busy! The flexible, asynchronous nature of the online classroom and the rich discussion afforded by Dr. Bernauer's constructivist approach in qualitative research led to great learning for me. I know Dr. Bernauer hasn't labeled it as such, but I believe that his class effectively employed the guided inquiry learning model. Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari (2015) define

guided inquiry as “inquiry that is designed and guided by a Learning Team to enable students to gain deep personal meaning through a wide range of resources” (p. 3). The team-based nature of our threaded discussions enabled a certain comradery to develop during the learning-creation process. It also promoted mastery of the subject matter since engaging in meaningful conversations required diving deep into the content. By consulting numerous sources and conversing continually, I believe I developed command of the content better than I would have in a traditional classroom setting which is limited by time constraints and the fact that only one voice can enter the conversation at a time.

As with all things, guided inquiry is not without its challenges. For me, online guided inquiry resulted in some discussion fatigue and teammate frustration. I experienced this when I was ready for a conversation to be over, while another classmate wanted it to continue. In spite of this drawback, I definitely feel that the inquiry-based online classroom led to a rich understanding of qualitative research methods that I will carry with me for years to come.

Jen's Response

Upon reading this first research question, the one word that came to my mind was “free”! Honestly, I find the whole notion of qualitative research to be fascinating, as it permits human beings the latitude to express what they perceive is needed. For example, Dr. Bernauer, who was also our professor for two other classes, had collaborated with Dr. Marilyn Lichtman and had invited her to participate in our online Discussion Board in one of our courses. This was especially beneficial for me, as she had reviewed a transcribed interview that I had conducted related to my research and guided me in a unique coding process that can be used in qualitative research methods.

I chose online education because I felt that it was the best option for my family situation and also because I wanted the freedom to manage my job around other obligations. Online education allows freedom to study when most convenient for the student. I needed this liberty to afford me the best opportunities to be spouse, mother, professional, *and* student. Under the watchful guide of Dr. Bernauer, who shall endearingly be referred to by me as Dr. B. for the rest of this study, the prospect of employing qualitative methods in my research propagated exponentially. My brain tends to prefer order—I like math and statistics and thus was initially drawn to quantitative research. However, after becoming exposed to qualitative research and its wondrous possibilities, I felt as though a world of opportunity had suddenly opened before me and I was enlightened!

My research topic for my dissertation is humanistic in nature and seeks to study the stress responses and coping methods of first responders, in an attempt to improve education and awareness and provide access to needed help. In our online Ph.D. program, we have investigated various qualitative research methods and I am using phenomenology in my research since its purpose and characteristics are to “describe a common meaning for several individuals of their lives experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Without qualitative research, answering questions around my topic would have been impossible.

Becca speaks about the collaboration among online students and from a qualitative perspective, our discussion board was always rich with discourse! However, Becca eludes to the disadvantages of online discussion, specifically where some students will not “end a conversation” or accept another’s views. I do not appreciate situations such as these, but there are times when perhaps one student has the availability of time and is able to continue elaborating. This dissonance sometimes created a breeding ground for dissension. Probably the most significant deficiency of online education from a qualitative perspective is that you lose

the ability to read people's expressions, body language, tone of voice, etc. These characteristics are very difficult to capture in threaded discussions on a screen.

Like Becca's says, the flexibility of online education was initially the only impetus for my choosing it. I am a people person by nature and would have much rather preferred to take classes in a traditional classroom setting. However, after being a student in online education for two years, I now appreciate the benefits of its delivery methods including the ever present, effervescent, required self-discipline and independence. I believe I already possessed these qualities but being an online student has honed these skills wondrously. I find that I am able to produce a lot of work in less time than ever before because I have learned to carve out just the right amount of information and in the right amount of words.

To conclude my response to RQ1 and my description of qualitative research as providing freedom, I also want to add the importance of comprehensive research and connecting the present to the past. No two experiences can ever be alike, for no two people ever occupy the exact same space and time. Qualitative research intends to capture that which means the most to us through experiences. Like Becca describes in her response to the second interview question, online education has afforded me the ability to be the wife, mother, and working professional that I want to be. I am not going to say that I do not overextend myself, but in many capacities, this is one of my personality traits, which leads to the more personal aspects of being an online Ph.D. student that are better addressed in RQ2.

Jim's Response

Becca and Jen are members of the first online doctoral cohort at my university that began in the summer of 2016 with an expected graduation date of May, 2019. The traditional classroom-based doctoral cohort program was begun prior to the online section and I was asked to convert three "methods" courses from our traditional format to the online format using BlackBoard as the learning platform. The *Critical Readings* course provides an overview of research methods and is the first course taken by students in the summer while *Qualitative Research* follows in the Fall and *Statistical Procedures* in the Spring. I taught Jen and Becca *Qualitative Research* in the Fall of 2016. Although I was trained in the quantitative research tradition in my doctoral program, I have conducted most of my scholarly inquiry within the qualitative tradition during the past ten years because I believe that it captures the complexity of learning and teaching in a more authentic and useful way. As a consequence, focusing on teaching and learning qualitative research in this article has been extremely rewarding!

I also need to point out that I consider Jen and Becca among the most diligent and reflective students that I have taught in the doctoral program during the past ten years. Reading their responses sets my mind back again to the Fall of 2016 to that first qualitative research online course. I recall vividly that it was both exciting and frightening at the same time – exciting because of being part of a new teaching venture and frightening because I was concerned that I would not be able to bring qualitative research alive in an online format. Well, let me say that after twice teaching this course online and teaching it a third time during the Fall of 2018, I have found teaching qualitative research online to be one of the best experiences of my teaching career! While convenience and the ability to carry on with one's life is critical from a student perspective as described by Becca and Jen, I have also found, as Becca indicates, that the level of student engagement and the richness of the learning and teaching experiences match or exceed what I experienced in the traditional classroom. However, let me be quick to say that online learning and teaching does not work as well as a traditional classroom for all teachers and students nor for some subject areas that require "hands on" learning using sophisticated equipment such as perhaps physics or requiring human interaction such as nursing.

One of the differences between teaching qualitative inquiry in the traditional classroom compared to online is that contrary to my expectations, I found that I was able to engage students more deeply in the theory and practice of qualitative inquiry in the online classroom. I think that a major reason for this is that engagement opportunities go well beyond typical classroom hours and become virtually 24/7. I also like to think of the online environment as one where students are sitting in a circle and everybody has clear and equal access to share their ideas and views which facilitates meaningful conversations. There is no “back row” in online learning where students can be invisible (either intentionally or non-intentionally) nor do some students who are more social and interactive by nature command most of the precious allotted class time leaving less time for others to converse. In addition, while team activities can be used in a traditional classroom just as in an online classroom, I find that the online environment provides wonderful opportunities to promote engagement and more open access to learning qualitative inquiry.

I am particularly delighted by Becca’s comparison of qualitative research to action research. Like Becca, who was educated in mathematics and Jen who tended toward “order,” I was trained in quantitative methodology and so we all shared a certain mindset as to what qualifies as “research.” I think that Becca’s revelation regarding qualitative research parallels my own when I crossed the QUAN-QUAL highway and also resonates with Jen’s “free” exclamation regarding her entrée into qualitative research. I should add that because of my graduate *training* in quantitative methods and statistics, I also teach these topics in addition to qualitative research which sometimes fosters a split mindset! The reason that I emphasized the term *training* is because as I think back to my doctoral program, I now realize that, while I still appreciate my background in quantitative research, I think of Bruner’s observation that while *training* is useful for teaching what we already know, *education* enables us to prepare individuals for what we don’t know (Bruner, 1966). While I recognize that there are thoughtful, creative, and reflective quantitative researchers who continue to contribute to our knowledge base, when it comes to teaching, learning, and human understanding (which are my areas of interest), my belief is that the assumptions and methods of qualitative inquiry provide a much better match to my personal ways of knowing (see Polanyi, 1958).

I must also add that after reading both Becca’s and Jen’s response to RQ1 about learning qualitative research, I am filled with a deep sense of satisfaction (perhaps even pride) when I think that perhaps I may have contributed in some way to the depth of their reflections. Becca’s hunch that I used some type of “guided inquiry learning” is especially satisfying because I believe that I learn as much from students as we engage with new ideas as they do from me and so I see my role more as a “guide” than as a “teacher.” In addition, Becca’s appreciation for the “content” that is qualitative inquiry is also a source of great satisfaction. Jen’s use of the term “free” in relation to her learning about qualitative research also resonated with me as it did for Becca. I too experienced this new freedom to discover and appreciate phenomena that were of deep interest to me as well as my own perceptions and reflections about these phenomena without needing to appear *scientific* by using *instruments* that were demonstrated to be *valid* and *reliable* while *controlling* for *extraneous variance*. While qualitative researchers certainly diligently work to produce quality studies and use methods designed to promote the trustworthiness of findings, they do not do so at the expense of relinquishing their own valued insights and perspectives about phenomena that cannot be adequately captured under the quantitative paradigm and methods (see O’Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). Because Becca and Jen and I share this mindset, I think of them as colleagues rather than students.

Interview Question 2 (RQ2): How would you describe the impacts of becoming a full-time doctoral student on your family life including relationships within your family, new allocations of responsibilities, and any other impacts?

Becca's Response

Since this question was initially posed, I have been both eager and hesitant to respond to it, as I know doing so will require complete transparency in an area of my life that I hold so dear—my family. Seventeen years ago, I married my high school sweetheart, and together we have five children—four boys and one girl. Having grown up in a big Catholic family of eight children, I always knew that I too wanted a big family. My parents were incredible—devout, selfless, and so in love with one another. Their love for one another was the most comforting gift as a child. Wherever they were felt like “home” to me. I think my great admiration for my parents, combined with my own personality—which teems of choleric and melancholic attributes—fed into my joint longing/hesitancy to respond to this research question.

Since I consider myself choleric-melancholic, I think it would be helpful to identify what aspects of these temperaments are present in my personality, especially since I think they have *greatly* impacted the way I have managed my doctoral studies and family responsibilities. As a choleric individual, I am pragmatic, logical, intense, goal-oriented, driven, productive, competitive, persevering, and self-reliant. I am also impatient and defensive (Bennett & Bennett, 2005). Whether from pride or stubbornness, I am not a fan of being wrong. Thankfully, I'm aware of these flaws and do my best to continually work on them. My self-awareness demonstrates that I am also melancholic. As such, I am thoughtful, spiritual, deep, reflective, sensitive, anxious and perfectionistic (Bennett & Bennett, 2005). This temperament juxtaposition of driven, yet sensitive, competitive, yet anxious is likely at the root of my mixed feelings regarding responding to this research question. But with reckless abandon, here goes!

When I first began the doctoral program, I had to establish a whole new “normal” for my family. My husband and I knew some household duties would need to be reassigned. Thankfully, my husband owns his own business, which affords him some flexibility. He committed to helping more with transportation of the children, general everyday cleaning, and some weekday dinner prep. Another element that took some time to fine tune was how I divided my time. Prior to the doctoral program, my husband and children were largely accustomed to my working at “work” and being fully present when I was at home. As an online doctoral student, the home suddenly became my classroom. Initially, I tried to complete all of my coursework early in the morning and late at night, but I struggled to compartmentalize my time as a student. I have always wrestled with academic perfectionism and tend to devote more time to my studies than is needed. I realized that this habit had reemerged by the end of year one, and I needed to address it. Ultimately, I had to give myself permission to give less, knowing it would still be more than enough. I think this was a very healthy move, because during the first year I often questioned whether what I was doing was really “the best” thing for my family. Earning a terminal degree had always been a dream of mine. Additionally, with a Ph.D. in hand, I could hopefully earn a faculty position at a university, which would have the added benefit of providing tuition remission to my children. My own mom worked at a university and six of my siblings were granted the beautiful gift of a free college education because of her employment there. This was a gift I deeply desired to give to my own children. While my children were fully aware that I was getting my doctorate so I could eventually teach at a university and provide them with a free college education I continually asked myself questions like: “Is paying for the kids’ college more important than the quality time I’m missing with them right now?” Thankfully, my husband brought some perspective to these feelings. What I really needed was greater balance and to be firm about “shutting off” school at set times.

Six months into the doctoral program, I was offered my “dream job” as a tenure track university professor, and so a whole new level of anxiety entered the scene. The fear of failing to transition successfully overwhelmed me. My mind swirled with questions. “What if I can’t handle all new preps along with my dissertation writing and course work?” “What about my

children? They've had to sacrifice so much of me already, how can I ask them to sacrifice anymore?" These questions weighed heavily on my heart. With prayer and support from family, I was able to navigate these feelings and trust that if God was calling me to make a job change, he would provide the grace necessary to do it. I accepted the new position, so year two of my doctoral studies involved a considerable increase in work.

To make the job-change work for our family, we needed additional help. My mom, who has always been one of my greatest advocates, came over two evenings a week after work to help with laundry, dishes, and carpooling. My twins, who were now 15-year-old freshmen, were solely responsible for their laundry, school assignments, and cleaning their bedroom and bathroom. I did help them occasionally with mathematics and my husband helped with revising their English essays. However, we really wanted both of them to work on being more self-sufficient. Though there were some growing pains and occasional fighting, the twins managed to adjust pretty well.

One element I struggled to balance during year two of the doctoral program was the screen time my younger children were exposed to, particularly my 11-year old, who is what I term "a gamer." He is the sweetest and most docile boy, but if he had no adult supervision, he would play video games 24-7. While my husband and I set guidelines for video game play, I struggled to stay firm with these guidelines. Unfortunately, this child, who is typically an A student, ended up with a C in a different subject every quarter this past year. Honestly, I think that our plates were just so full that he sometimes flew under our radars. My husband and I talked at length and committed to making sure he doesn't repeat the same behavior next year. I will have no new preps next year, so I know I won't be stretched as thin and can offer the reinforcement he needs to meet his potential.

My two youngest children had great school years. Both ended with straight A's and showed consistent gains in different areas. Because they are both young and talkative, they are honest about how much they feel I work. Both have said more than once, "You always have to work" and "When you're on your computer, you don't listen to me." I know this was a long year and I'm sure these claims were true on more than one occasion. My husband and I just continually reminded them that this past year was just a season. In fact, when I told my daughter this past week that I'll be done with my doctorate in less than a year she smiled and said, "Just a year-that's not long at all!" Her optimism was music to my ears. We've all gained a certain degree of perseverance through this journey and for that I am so appreciative.

As I conclude, I want to reflect on the similarities and differences between my own and Jen's doctoral journeys. Both of us were accompanied by our five children throughout this process, which is a remarkable similarity! However, Jen's children are older and more independent than mine. In addition, Jen and I have very different professions. While I embarked on a new career in academia during my time as a doctoral student, Jen continued in an EMS position in which she is a seasoned veteran. These elements undoubtedly created very different experiences for the two of us. While I am so grateful that I could pursue a Ph.D., I know that I sacrificed some important mothering during this time. But even in the midst of this regret, I am thankful because this program transformed my feelings about my vocation as a mom. It's often said that the job of mother, though likely one of the world's toughest tasks, is thankless and overlooked; I too am guilty of such feelings. At my core, I know motherhood is critical. My children desperately need me to love, nurture, educate, and provide for them so they can grow into the adults they are called to be. But the monotony of it all can blind me to these truths. Having to temporarily give less to my vocation as a mother to complete my Ph.D. has opened my eyes to how valuable my motherly presence is. I believe I will exit my doctoral studies with a refreshed, thankful perspective for my motherhood and a deeper understanding of my personality and temperament. I believe this will make me a better version of myself, and for this, I am truly grateful.

Jen's Response

To best answer this research question, I must first note the importance of faith, self, and family in my life. In any large commitment as in this Ph.D. quest, there must exist faithfulness to those who mean the most in our lives and for me, these include my family, my faith, and myself.

As I reflect upon my marital life these past three decades, my desire to complete a Ph.D. was *never* a consideration and so this part of my life-changing journey has required more support from my husband and children to do chores that I no longer had the time to do. Additionally, my husband and children were also exposed to my emotional roller coaster as a consequence of being dedicated to every one of my life's facets and they were called upon to be patient. I had a lot to juggle and I required my family to be understanding of my personality changes. My husband and I will be married 29 years in a couple of months. We have a 20-year-old son in his second year of college, studying history, and quadruplets consisting of 3 girls and a boy who are 16 and juniors in high school. Yes, life is very busy! Ironically, Becca and I both have multiples and we both have five children! I think it is amazing that in our small cohort population of just 11, there are two with very similar stories.

I chose online education because of the freedom I require to maintain as much involvement in my children's lives as possible as well as what is needed for me to remain in my full-time position as the training officer and paramedic/rescue technician at my place of employment. Because of my profession, there are times when I have been away from home for extended periods of time, which can be a breeding ground for increased stress. "Increased stress, time away from work and family disruptions...in healthcare workers have all been correlated to adverse effects" (Delbridge, Myers, Cone, & Brice, 2015, p. 494). This stress can negatively affect my family. However, *there* may be times that I have missed dinner because of my profession, but *never* because of my Ph.D. studies.

The concept of changing household responsibilities is not new to my husband or children and so my family was already primed for such changes in their schedule as I worked to complete my Ph.D. The likenesses and differences between Becca's story and mine with regard to this topic are striking. Becca relates she had to recognize a "whole new normal" of chore and responsibility divisions because of the significant change in her schedule, whereas my schedule has always been haphazard and disorganized because of my profession. My family and I are used to this chaos. The possibility always exists that I may get called away from home for an unscheduled shift. My profession has taught me how to fit all of my wants and needs into my diary throughout life and so I am accustomed to spontaneous schedule changes. I've really never had a "normal" work schedule. However, there are only so many hours in a week and fitting everything in, including sleep, can sometimes be a challenge with a person like me (and Becca) who are driven and want to do everything.

Becca's story and mine are so similar. There were topics that I eliminated from my initial reflection of this research question, but upon reading Becca's biography, I realize that some of what she wrote was very much present in my life as well, particularly: parenting. The likenesses in our stories regarding screen time, gaming, YouTube®, grades—oh my goodness, strikingly similar! And I so adore Becca's writing ability to put into words that which I did as well in the beginning of the Ph.D. program: "I really struggled to manage some of my perfectionist tendencies. I definitely devoted more time to my studies than was actually needed. I realized this and gave myself permission to give less, knowing it would still be more than enough" (Rook, personal communication, 2018). Thank you for your eloquence, Becca.

My children have all been in their teenage years during my Ph.D. journey. However, because they are teenagers, they possess the typical teenager mentality. I assign tasks but whether the tasks get done or well enough to my liking is another challenge! Raising five

teenagers is a challenge by itself, whether in a Ph.D. program or not! Regardless of my studies, my children would still have chores to do. Admittedly, they have more responsibilities because I am in school. If it weren't for this research, I might never have recognized that my children may think they have more chores because I am in school. My family completes about 5-10 loads of laundry a day, but not because I am in school. I have taught my children to be independent, regardless of my schooling, but because of my studies I know that I depend on them more than if I were not in school. Becca's reference to meal prep is very similar to my position. However, my children are a little older than Becca's, affording me more opportunity to ask my children to prepare meals, and a couple of them like to, which is a great advantage!

My study workspace is like Becca's: in the home. My space is at our dining room table which is located in a combined kitchen/dining area. This large room is the "hub." I can still be with my children, though doing my schoolwork. I remember a time when I first began this Ph.D. journey and my children had a couple of friends over. I was sitting at my workspace and my one daughter was showing her friends around. She pointed at me and said, "this is my Mom in her habitat..." and they kept walking, with smiles. I don't know if I should insert a smiley face or a frownie face here. One cannot predict what life would truly be like if it were "different," to say that if I were not in a Ph.D. program, what would I have been doing during their tour?

I make it a point to remain infused in my children's lives as much as I can. Working in a profession that requires shiftwork and where I am truly NEVER off the clock, can be demanding. I have learned to balance work and my personal life over the past 3+ decades. Some of my volunteer work in public safety requires me to be accessible 24/7. Hence, I sleep with my cell phone under my pillow. I have had people say "Did you have to stop at that car accident? Were you on duty?" Well, no, I am not always *officially* on duty but ask the mother of her newborn baby that arrived in the parking lot of a convenience store a couple months ago if she wanted me to help her in the front seat of her car? I was not officially on duty, was in "street clothes," was not identifiable as a paramedic except that the incident occurred in the district where I work and, well, I've never seen three police officers so happy to see me in all of their lives! Our supervisor pulled in and recalled when he saw my car that he looked up at the sky, and loudly exclaimed, "Sweet Jesus, thank God! Jen is here!" Insert smiley face. :-) (Mom, Dad, and Baby are fine. I can't say the same is true, however, for the three police officers!)

Probably the two components that suffer the most because of my increased time commitments of being a Ph.D. student include that I take less time for me and I have less time to be with friends. I do not get much of either but also recognize that this is a temporary sacrifice and when I do get some personal freedom, I enjoy it even more.

Like Becca, I wish that I could spend more time with my children. My perception is that they are looking to be more of a family, when in fact, maybe they are not in search of this at all. My children are outgoing, thankfully, and have witnessed other familial environments and I believe they believe, know, and understand how hard my husband and I work to provide for the family environment. My perception is skewed because I am the "nuclear mom" who believes that being a mom outside the confines of Hollywood is the same as within its confines. Meaning, that Hollywood does not portray family life well and that real life is not like what we see on TV. Families do fight, and houses don't all have white picket fences around them. My morals, values, and ethics point to perfection like the "nuclear" families of Hollywood, but life is not perfect and in reality, teenagers do not require continual "Mommy and me" time as was true when they were younger. And so perhaps this Ph.D. journey for me has come at the right time in my life because it is the right time in my *children's* lives.

Becca references second-guessing her decision to enroll in a Ph.D.—weighing its benefits against its disadvantages. Hindsight is always 20/20. Becca, this is for you: Don't

second-guess your decision. We can ALL do that until the cows come home, but this journey for you and for me is not a selfish one. We have continued to persevere in the selfless roles of wife and mother, and all the other roles: daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, friend, dedicated student, superb cohort member, professional, upstanding citizen of society, while being loyal to our religious beliefs. Good Lord, who could ask for more? No one— including us.

As I “qualitatively” reflect upon the research questions, I have uncovered a couple of thoughts that I may not have considered in the absence of this research. Like Becca, I too have found that this journey has been so enriching and the benefits to every part of my being, both professionally and personally, are priceless. The final thought I will leave with you is that I believe my studies have intrigued my children to wonder what *they* might want in life as they navigate through the teenage years into adulthood. Children are *extremely and precisely* observant. In the very beginning of my return to higher education, I would steal away to the “quiet” den to study and my children would grab a book and follow me. Oh my, how extreme, precise, and wonderful is that?! :-)

Jim’s Response

When I first asked Jen and Becca if they would be interested in collaborating in this study it had nothing to do with their both having larger families but rather because of their engagement in qualitative inquiry. Here were two adults who, although their experiences were already both wide and deep, thirsted for yet more learning and were willing to sacrifice a great deal in order to continue their journeys. But, five children? Both Becca and Jen have five kids requiring time and attention—this is truly a “remarkable similarity” to quote Becca! When I began reading Becca’s response, I felt like I was intruding into sacred family space including her “choleric/melancholic” personality! Revealing the privacy of family life makes us vulnerable to the world—almost like living in a glass house where everybody can see what is going on. And so, I want to express my deepest gratitude to both Becca and Jen for trusting me to look through these glass walls!

Becca and Jen painted pictures that cannot help but stir the emotions in a positive and delightful way! When I reflect on the unbelievable time demands on each of them, that alone is a bit mind boggling. However, when I think about what these time demands are constituted of (spouses, children, household responsibilities, professional responsibilities), it is quite clear that these are not “trivial pursuits” but rather comprise the most important components of our lives and require much dedicated time and effort. And now, they have “added on” yet another non-trivial pursuit (the pursuit of the Ph.D.), which has had a significant impact on themselves and their families. How can we not recognize these accomplishments and offer our deepest respect and accolades?

The predominant place of religious faith and family love permeates both Becca’s and Jen’s responses and I am reminded of Maslow’s (1970) depiction in his Hierarchy of Needs where “deficiency needs” must first be satisfied in order to try and fulfill “growth needs.” If it is indeed the case that we must first have a solid foundation on which to build by having our safety, esteem, and belonging needs met before we can embark on the ethereal quest for “self-actualization” then both of these students possess this foundation – how blessed they are! In addition, by sharing their personal stories, they have demonstrated a willingness to not “hide their light under a bushel” but rather to allow their light to shine in a wide arc in order to guide others.

Readers will also undoubtedly see the tension that both Jen and Becca have experienced between being both “mom,” “spouse, and “emerging scholar.” While these roles require a deep sense of purpose, dedication, perseverance, with a concomitant growth in knowledge and

understanding, they also require (to use modern parlance) different “skill sets.” The dynamics of family life may present us with the kind of opportunities and challenges that can sometimes catapult us to self-actualization but at other times send us back down to those lower rungs that we thought were behind us. While academe may not plumb the same depths of feeling as family, because it opens up the opportunity to explore phenomena of deep interest to us as well as our growing metacognitive awareness of these phenomena, it requires us to expend time and attention from our limited pool of resources which, of necessity, requires that compromises be made with our other outlay of expenditures including family life. Becca speaks of a “new normal” that now defines her and Jen’s lives. The metaphor of a juggler comes to mind when I read their stories. I see the jugglers (Becca and Jen) not moving quickly but rather at a more purposeful pace so that each audience (family and academe) perceives that they are being given the juggler’s full attention during those moments when she turns toward them. While each juggler has become an expert at what they do as revealed by their narratives, I can’t help but think that they sometimes get momentarily stuck during transitions before unconsciously thinking to themselves “the show must go on.” I am honored to be a part of the audience who has watched this show go on for almost three years—quite a long run!

Part II: Professor and Family Members

Unlike the first part of this study that examined teaching and learning qualitative inquiry as part of a formal doctoral experience, this component of the study explored teaching and learning qualitative inquiry within a family consisting of Jim, Mary Pat, and Patrick using a group interview for data collection. As noted previously, this study is built on a previous study (Bernauer et al., 2017) that examined caring in education which means that rather than first focusing on “methods,” we simply jumped into our group interview in order to learn about how instances of caring and non-caring affected Patrick in terms of motivation to learn. So, rather than “letters to self,” we decided to again use the group interview rather than letters-to-self (actually a conversation at the dining room table!) like we did in this previous study. We made this choice for data collection because it just seemed like a more natural way for us to communicate. In addition, rather than present data in its entirety, the conversation was recorded and analyzed by Jim using Oral Coding (Bernauer, 2015)

Interview Question 3 (RQ3): How would you describe your experience learning/teaching about qualitative research in our family setting related to caring in education?

We (Patrick, Mary Pat, and Jim) began our conversation by recalling our prior experiences collecting data, writing the article, and presenting both at the 2017 annual TQR Conference as well as at Brock University in Ontario, Canada during the summers of 2017 and 2018. The recollection of these experiences constitutes the data upon which the responses were generated for RQ3.

Patrick (who is now 22 years old) began by saying something that struck an emotional chord with all of us—“these experiences made me feel important and that my opinions had more value while quantitative approaches are just like questions and answers—I was actually listened to.” He likened quantitative research to “copying notes” in a college class where you really don’t care about them, but, rather, they are simply for test purposes. In a humorous twist, he then said that “I had a nightmare last night about writing notes on the board and that’s why I used that analogy”! He also likes the fact that in qualitative research you “talk to others personally and you get to write down how it feels to contribute to a study using qualitative research.” He also pointed out that while not everything that is said in an interview makes it to the final report that it is the “interesting parts” that are reported. Patrick concluded by saying

that actually presenting to others both at the TQR Conference as well as at Brock University “amplified” his experiences of learning and liking qualitative research because learning about qualitative research “took us places.” He then likened quantitative approaches as similar to learning algebra “where we are promised of real-world applications . . . and it rarely is with no tangible result or reward.” However, with the knowledge acquired in qualitative research there have been “real tangible experiences and rewards.” Although this comparison using algebra as a surrogate for quantitative research may not be quite fair, in his mind and based on his experiences, this is how he evaluates the merits of qualitative inquiry.

As the “mother researcher” (MR) both in this current study and the previous one (Bernauer et al., 2017), Mary Pat after listening to Patrick’s response, nodded her head and indicated that as a result of this study she has learned a lot about “how we work together as a family and share ideas and work through some of the things that most families probably don’t do.” Her “takeaway” was that using qualitative inquiry in our family setting helps us to communicate in a way that is like “sitting around the dinner table” but in a way that is more focused and helps us to get at things in a way that casual daily conversation does not afford us. Patrick’s observation that “while not everything that is said in an interview makes it to the final report that it is the “interesting parts” that are reported” also reminded me that while all data are generally used in quantitative data analysis in both descriptive and inferential statistics, that this is not the case for qualitative research and so it is indeed our responsibility and challenge to find the “interesting parts” that get at the heart of our purpose for conducting a study. As I listened and reflected on Mary Pat’s response and read “between the lines” both from what she said and how she said it, it struck me that the methods of qualitative inquiry need not be imposed on families because they already exist in our better family moments – caring, listening, and learning always remain in style!

As a university professor, Mary Pat’s spouse, and Patrick’s father, I must admit that I was and am quite happy with the responses to RQ3! It struck me that the experiences we have had conducting family research thus far have allowed Patrick to build upon what he learned as a journalism and marketing major—he graduated from the University of Dayton in May, 2018 and for us as parents to continue to share in his journey. It’s as if he has begun a new component along the learning continuum that has allowed him to integrate his learning in a way that makes sense to him because his experience with learning qualitative research was focused on an area of educational concern that was important to him (caring in education) rather than beginning to learn about qualitative inquiry via a formal qualitative methods course. Although Becca and Jen did, in fact, begin to learn about qualitative research in a formal methods course, this current study has allowed them to apply qualitative methods to their areas of interest in close proximity to their course work. In addition, although their families did not directly participate in this current study, the impact of family comes through in their writing in bright and colorful ways. Family is indeed important in relation to what we learn and value whether through participant or non-participant research approaches.

Interview Question 4 (RQ4): Should we continue this practice of using qualitative research in other areas of concern?

Patrick began by saying that he liked family group interviews rather than “academic writing.” Because it seemed that Patrick felt like that was all he needed to say in response to this question, I went into “professor mode” and explained that unlike quantitative inquiry where research questions and instruments are “set in stone,” we are “allowed” to modify what we ask under the qualitative paradigm if it seems like we need to switch gears in order to obtain “rich data.” His “aha” response, though conveying only passive interest in this methodological detail, allowed me to probe for deeper meaning by asking “what other things in our family life might

we explore using interviewing and qualitative research that would be of interest to all of us?” There was a pause and then he said something quite unexpected! In order to make sense of this response I must provide the contextual background -- we recently got a female Beagle puppy (Roxy) as company for our three-year old male Beagle (Rudy). He began by saying that just like Roxy is learning from Rudy, because he (Patrick) is an only child, this experience has simulated sibling learning in a sense because he has been a full partner in our research and has felt “listened to.” He hastened to add that he always felt loved and respected by us (his parents) but that this approach of focusing in on important things in a family interview has made a big impact on his becoming an adult. He added that if you observe Roxy, she copies what Rudy does—sleeps in a certain place and stretches and jumps on you just like Rudy [Note: the sound of two howling Beagles was heard at this moment which caused shared laughter to erupt!].

Patrick then wondered whether the “phrasing” of their howling and barking was now becoming more similar. His point was that by engaging in the kind of intimate research we engaged in as a family that we got to learn both more from each other and also from ourselves as we thought aloud during these interviews. However, when I pressed him by asking pointedly whether we should plan future sessions where we could explore his career options as a recent college graduate, his blunt reply was “no, this is a me discussion—this is an internal journey.” Because I think I use humor at times as a defense mechanism, I recall thinking “well, you can’t win them all”! And so, the future course of these family conversations is yet-to-be-determined; however, I can’t help but think that this line of research has come at exactly the right time in our son’s life as he wrestles with his future. But, then again, there are so many “turning points” in our lives that I just wish we had begun this research years earlier—no formal “methods” training required!

As parents, Mary Pat and I were more than casual listeners to Patrick’s response; rather, we listened intently but did not want to “intrude.” However, we both felt a poignant reaction towards his allusion to “simulated sibling learning” with our Beagles—oh the memories and feelings we as parents often experience when looking back on our children’s childhood! Mary Pat and I also resonated with Patrick’s response that he felt “listened to” during this study—that made us both quite happy! Mary Pat felt that doing a “study” such as this current one would make sense especially in circumstances when there is “something that is pressing or there is uncertainty or decisions to be made” that engaging in a group interview would be a good way to go about trying to help resolve issues by “bouncing ideas off each other” such as when Patrick needs to make big decisions such as career—although Patrick, as noted above, thought this was more of an “internal journey”—the need for privacy and ownership sometimes has a tenuous relationship with family sharing. So, I then asked Patrick whether he experienced our study in any way as “prying” and he responded that he “doesn’t think of any of this as prying.” With this response, we both concluded that he saw this study as another manifestation of caring—this made us both quite happy and so we stopped this conversation on a very positive note!

Discussion

What follows are reflections of the stories that were told by the participant-researchers, with particular attention to how these stories, and the epiphanies they manifested, relate to both the research questions and the literature.

Jen’s Reflections

Having been asked to be a part of this research was an honor from the beginning and as I have watched it unfold and come together, I can’t help but reflect upon how it has provided

growth in me *as a person who just happens to be a student*. I believe the use of autoethnography as the research method in this study provided a valuable and rich introspective lens with which to examine my relationships and roles as student, peer, mother, wife, worker, and co-researcher. “Life is not real until it has been told like a story” (Muncey, 2002) and the use of autoethnography has permitted the freedom to share my experiences as a Ph.D. student and especially learning about qualitative inquiry. Based on my own self-reflections and in collaboration with my fellow researchers and their reflections, this study has enlightened me as to how my life has been affected by my Ph.D. journey in general and my introduction to qualitative inquiry in particular.

After reading Dr. B.’s responses, I think that this research may have begun with students in mind as he speaks of the mind-boggling time commitment that we must incur. He is correct - it is almost implausible. If someone had told me all that would be required of me down to the last minute prior to making my decision to apply to this Ph.D. program, I might have had second thoughts. And yet for those who are motivated and determined, we all find an avenue to focus our energy. At this time in my life, I have chosen to study. I believe that this qualitative research project evolved into a much deeper quest with results that exceed what might have been the initial supposition of how it would unfold. Qualitative inquiry gives permission for such freedom to occur, thankfully, because if it did not, none of us would have been given the permission to express ourselves as freely as we did. Qualitative research is the “systematic investigation of social phenomena and human behavior and interaction” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 4)—and I believe qualitative research methods reach to the heart and soul of many of the questions. In this current research, qualitative inquiry gives you, the reader, the permission to accept and understand us, those who were studied and those who researched, without condition. Because the academic world yearns for results, qualitative methods can be used to engender results by assigning thematic meaning to phenomena we find of deep interest.

This research has helped me to envision how I have been fulfilled within the Ph.D. program as a student, but it also helped me to visualize how my journey unfolded as a human being. To further explain, qualitative research affects students differently than quantitative research and qualitative research can provide students a window with which to provide for a better understanding of one’s self as a person, not just as a student. The impact that I am having on my children and husband, fellow classmates, professors, co-workers, and my patients are probably substantial but not something I think about. As I put the finishing touches on my Ph.D., I realized in part because of this research project, that I too will have earned some of the rights of honor within Academia. Reading Dr. B.’s responses has made me a little proud of what I have accomplished, though it is still difficult for me to understand or envision the potential significance of what I am doing, even with impending graduation just a few short months away.

Life has a unique way of catapulting us through it much like an explorer in orbit. We have a path but may become jarred by its challenges and struggles. However, it is these challenges and struggles that often make us stronger and better prepared for the future. As humans, we become forever changed by the experiences of each day, regardless of how ordinary, dramatic, or life-altering they may be. As we maneuver through life, some of our daily events might be connected to a larger purpose and build upon each other such as in this Ph.D. journey and this research and sometimes we cannot envision the end until the project is complete. The unknowns also throw pigment on our stories and affect our small and large projects, and our souls.

John Lash’s remarks (see below under “Jim’s Reflections”) about his very structured profession reminded me of quantitative research and science. His comments also reminded me of how I had felt about the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods in the beginning of this Ph.D. program. As I became more aware, the notion of qualitative research

provided a new and different platform to assign meaning. This “new (to us) method” appears to have caused John to inquire beyond a surface understanding that he had perceived as being deep but then realized that it wasn’t as deep as he thought and that he was only “scratching the surface.” Wow...this is so poignant and affirms the expansive possibilities of qualitative research. Coming from a profession in medicine, I believe there is absolutely a place for quantitative research and its structure of understanding. But as I have watched medicine evolve in my four decades as a first responder, I recognize that we must also approach structure with an open mind.

The world is really never what we think it is because there is always something new and different to learn. To accept this is to understand qualitative inquiry, methods, and research. Thank you for allowing me to enter the world of qualitative research through the eyes of mine.

Becca’s Reflections

Participating in this autoethnographic study has been such an enriching and revealing experience for me. Given my personality traits, which I discussed earlier, I have an affinity for contemplation and reflection. When I first began learning about qualitative research, I was immediately drawn to it, as reflection is essential to producing the thick descriptions qualitative inquiry seeks. Autoethnography turns this very reflective lens inward, as the participant-researcher attempts to examine herself in a vulnerable and authentic manner, often revealing multiple layers of consciousness (Muncey, 2010). This is precisely the impact that this study had on me, both in my perceptions of learning about qualitative research and my perceptions of navigating an online Ph.D. program as a wife, mother of five children, and working professional.

Regarding the study of qualitative inquiry, I found a whole new world suddenly opened before me, just as Dr. Bernauer described earlier. My mathematical background had led me to generalize research as experimental study, so the idea of conducting in-depth research in a naturalistic setting to answer questions such as why and how was both exciting and concerning to me. These initial mixed feelings ultimately became the very reason qualitative inquiry appealed to me. The fact that my very thoughts oscillated between different points of view demonstrated that multiple realities—one of the critical pillars of qualitative research—indeed exists (Litchman, 2013)! I quickly realized how much I enjoyed the descriptive nature of qualitative inquiry. I loved that it valued the personal—especially each unique lived experience and each individual story. Through my study, I came to believe that qualitative inquiry can bring meaning, interpretation, and understanding to areas of human phenomena, interaction, and discourse in a way that quantitative inquiry is unable to generate.

My newfound awareness of and appreciation for multiple realities also made me all the more in-tune to the multiple realities taking place around me as I worked to juggle my responsibilities as a doctoral student and working mom. I truly believe that while I was “maxed out” in terms of time and tasks, I was still very aware of how my doctoral studies were impacting my home life. Both my introspective nature and concurrent study of qualitative inquiry made me all the more cognizant of how the various elements in our family life were being influenced by my very full plate. I think that this self-awareness cultivated a desire within me to be all the more present—present to each person that I come in contact with, present to the situations that I am confronted with, and more than anything, present to my family. I think this is one of the many beautiful influences that emerged as a result of learning about qualitative inquiry and then engaging in an autoethnographic study. As a participant-researcher, I believe I was able to cultivate a more mindful existence and conscientiousness through my participation in this study. Truly, I am grateful for this evolution of self and feel blessed that this study has in many ways stimulated a new advent of personal awareness in my life.

Jim's Reflections

I served as the “linchpin” of this study not because my contributions are more valuable than my co-researchers (they certainly are not) but simply because I was the common element in both the family and student groups. As such, I felt at times like I was driving a car since I was looking ahead but also sometimes looking at the side and rear mirrors. To those colleagues who adhere to an objectivist mindset, I can understand why they might see the terms “confounding variables” and “lack of validity” all over the car! All I can say to these colleagues is that they step back and ask themselves questions about *what* is really important to them as well as *who* is most important to them. I think they will find that discovering new insights and appreciations of phenomena that intrigue us as well as those that we respect and love are important enough that perhaps we should all expand our methodological blinders to allow for not only direct but also oblique images and sounds to be considered by both our logical and intuitive capacities. In fact, perhaps we should all try to use both “surround sound” and “surround vision” in order to see our world with more clarity and appreciation. While we may not have achieved this grandiose vision in this study, it has served as our motivation even if we were not always aware of it.

From a family standpoint, I learned that engaging in “research” can be as creative and free flowing as needed in order to get to the heart of the matter whether it’s investigating how caring in schooling affects future motivation to learn or how we learn about qualitative inquiry together. I also found that by using formal methods such as a family focus group where we learn to wait on others to speak and then listen closely to what they say (much like a “talking stick” exercise) that it can yield insights and understanding that complement natural family life. I am not sure when we will use more formal qualitative methods again in our family, but I do know that it has facilitated a better and more complete understanding of how we all fit into dynamic organizational unit that we call family. By allowing others in the family to feel like they have been “listened to” as Patrick expressed it, opens up deeper levels of communication that, at least in our case, was facilitated by engaging in a semi-formal qualitative study since the positive benefits of this study have continued to cascade throughout our family life. It has been an experience that I will always treasure.

From a student standpoint, I could have not asked for richer collaborators than Jen and Becca—they give professors renewed faith that what we do is well worth it. And, since I am currently teaching the same doctoral qualitative research course that I taught to Jen and Becca in 2016, I thought that I would share two comments from students taking the course in 2018 in relation to what they have learned—

My goal is to see meaning behind things and different points of view. Coming from more “hard sciences” (I know I may be using that term loosely) and having an accounting undergraduate degree and a business masters—a lot of my life has been about being “right or wrong” because there were numbers or specific binary markers that made clear delineation. This journey, and particularly learning more about qualitative research, has taught me to think of things beyond the surface—which I used to think that I did - but now realize I barely scratched the surface. (John Lash)

I think I need to focus on trying to focus more attention on those things which are less than familiar. I need to figure out what I want to do for the dissertation and get myself down the path. I need to determine how narrow or broad I want to be with it. I continue to grow and understand more as I go along and will continue to do so. I need to slow down just a bit and relax. I have a tendency to

focus on the end goal without as much focus on getting there. I need to enjoy some of the “getting there” in the next couple of years. I think the biggest take away for me is to be who you are, present authentically and with passion and you will be ok. (Chris Campbell)

These two student quotes epitomize to me what teaching and learning qualitative inquiry is all about—and what it is not about. It is all about opening up to self and to the world and to feel the freedom (per Jen) of conducting inquiry using body, mind, and spirit and the methods of qualitative inquiry either alone or in combination with the methods of quantitative inquiry. Being of “one cloth” exploring humans and how they live, love, and learn in our world requires that we take off the artificial blinders we sometimes put on in pursuit of scientific purity. Wolcott (1994) challenges us as researchers to be “... a bit more willing to concede that there are multiple ways to proceed with a study even after the data are in” (p. 394). This challenge is a delight to me, and I hope to continue to share this same delight with both family and students.

Summary

This study sought to investigate how teaching and learning qualitative inquiry affected professor and students and also consequent impacts on family life. Because of the dual nature of this study, it was broken into two parts in order to examine these questions. While we all strongly believed that there was a story to be told, there was also a messiness to be overcome since this “story” turned out to be multiple stories as experienced by all of us from different vantage points. Teaching and learning qualitative inquiry was revealed to be a feeling of being “free” (as described by Jen) since it allowed each of us to reach beyond accepted norms of what is considered “research” and to creatively imagine and construct approaches that phenomena seem to beckon us to invent and employ. However, qualitative inquiry also demands that we are transparent in how we approach phenomena and why readers should consider findings credible and trustworthy. We have tried in this inquiry to do abide by these criteria by highlighting what not only we found to be important but perhaps even insightful about teaching and learning qualitative inquiry in an online environment. Just as important, this study also recognized that we are much more than disembodied learners but also deeply immersed in the social milieu especially with our families. Therefore, we also sought to explore how our families were affected by our entry into doctoral work (as was the case with Becca and Jen as described in Part I) as well as the “story within a story” about caring and qualitative inquiry (as was the case with Jim, Mary Pat, and Patrick as described in Part II). Several insights experienced by all participant-researchers include the importance of giving people the freedom to participate to the fullest extent in inquiry and to try and understand how these experiences affect relationships within the online classroom setting and in the family setting. All of the participant-researchers in this study found merit in how qualitative methods positively impacted their lives and recognized that without this study this understanding would have been difficult to recognize and appreciate. We hope that readers will not only will find similarities and points of connection with their own experiences and contexts but that they identify areas that they can explore further in order to understand more deeply the phenomena that we have explored. We believe that this is a rich area for further research.

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