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Teaching Narrative Interviewing: Reflecting, Narrating, and Becoming-In-Action

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Abstract

Qualitative inquiry teachers often seek powerful pedagogies to improve their students' understandings. Using our experience leading a doctoral workshop, we share our method for teaching narrative interviewing using Schön's (1983) "reflection-in-action," meaning teachers and students reflect in the moment. We also root our pedagogy in Jerome Bruner's (1986, 1990) narrative as a mode of thinking and a mode of being, a philosophy exploring the ways learners story their own and others' lives. Describing our doctoral workshop, we highlight Laura, a recent graduate, narrating and becoming a qualitative inquirer. We conclude with a sample teaching lesson, designed to enhance students' reflective research practices.

Keywords

teaching, narrative, interviewing, learning, qualitative inquiry

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Teaching Narrative Interviewing: Reflecting, Narrating, and Becoming-In-Action

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Qualitative inquiry teachers often seek powerful pedagogies to improve their students' understandings. Using our experience leading a doctoral workshop, we share our method for teaching narrative interviewing using Schön's (1983) "reflection-in-action," meaning teachers and students reflect in the moment. We also root our pedagogy in Jerome Bruner's (1986, 1990) narrative as a mode of thinking and a mode of being, a philosophy exploring the ways learners story their own and others' lives. Describing our doctoral workshop, we highlight Laura, a recent graduate, narrating and becoming a qualitative inquirer. We conclude with a sample teaching lesson, designed to enhance students' reflective research practices.

Keywords: teaching, narrative, interviewing, learning, becoming, qualitative inquiry

Introduction

Leading a qualitative inquiry workshop for doctoral students, Sherri asked Laura, a recent mentee, questions about becoming a doctoral student, researcher, and graduate. Brett, a qualitative researcher specializing in narrative studies, sat on the side observing Sherri and the attendees. We (Sherri and Brett) knew most of the workshop's participants were earning Ed.D. degrees while working full-time in teaching and educational administrative positions, and we knew they gravitated toward practice-oriented learning experiences commonly associated with positivist research methods. They often applied quantitative structures, terminology, and reasoning to qualitative inquiry discourses throughout their coursework; thus, we sought to disrupt their normative perceptions by exposing them to a narrative interviewing experience. During the interview, Laura shared her story as a doctoral student and her dissertation process with the attendees, inviting them to embody courage by becoming qualitative researchers.

We share this experience to illustrate action-oriented, narrative interviewing as a powerful pedagogical practice for teaching and learning qualitative inquiry. We draw on Bruner's (1986, 1990) conception of narrative as a mode of thought, or verisimilitude of life and human action. Particularly, we highlight narrative as a transmitter of what Bruner (1986) considers "folk psychology"—that is, the cultural transactions of meanings. As most of the workshop's participants conflated quantitative and qualitative methodologies, our aim for the workshop included exposing students to qualitative inquiry, a research possibility they may have not explored or considered fitting their needs. The narrative interview experience presented what is possible as opposed to probable (Bruner, 1986) in terms of helping the workshop's participants imagine and re-imagine their own encounters, points-of-view, and perspectives relative to becoming researchers.

Listening to Laura's story, the attendees discussed touchstones for their academic lives, helping them understand qualitative inquiry and grow as professionals. Reflecting on this, we

considered the power of “reflection-in-action,” what Schön (1983) defines as thinking within the moments of practice, or simply, thinking on one’s feet. Laura’s narrative enabled listeners to imagine her experiences alongside their own experiences. In this vein, we deem narrative interviewing *vis-à-vis* live interactions reconstructs not only the interviewee’s storied experiences but may transform learners’ and perhaps teachers’ conceptions of themselves.

Backstory

In her formative years as a professor, Sherri successfully persuaded her colleagues steeped in positivist research methods to adopt a qualitative research class and allow her to teach it. A few years later, she imagined a series of workshops designed to educate the university’s students and faculty about qualitative methods. Sherri understood the power of authentic research and believed Laura’s story contained the propulsion necessary to transform the workshop’s participants—even when none of her colleagues attended the workshop. Without colleague support, Sherri looked outside her institution and invited Brett to join her workshop project.

Sherri believed Brett’s participation would expose the workshop’s attendees to a qualitative researcher not isolated within the university’s curricular space thus transforming their perceptions of qualitative inquiry. Brett helped Sherri craft interview questions and encouraged her to add adult learning strategies such as Mezirow’s (2000) “subjective reframing” to her workshop design: “Subjective reframing involves critical self-reflection of one’s own assumptions...” (p. 23). Sherri enacted Mezirow’s (2000) narrative reframing by “applying a reflective insight from someone else’s narrative to one’s own experience” (p. 23). Accordingly, Sherri wanted the attendees to challenge their assumptions by comparing Laura’s narrative to their own doctoral experiences.

Given Laura successfully graduated despite life challenges, we perceived her narrative would be impactful, so Sherri invited her to participate in the workshop. Laura agreed and allowed us to document and write about her experience. Exposing her genuine self, she faced the audience and began her narrative with tensions and challenges. She explained how halfway through her doctoral coursework, she was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, found herself plagued by medical bills, then burdened by a divorce. Amid the uncertainty of life and the ill effects of chemotherapy, she abandoned her academic goals and dismissed the possibility of finishing her degree, ignoring Sherri’s emails for approximately two years while assuming the graduate school’s mandatory completion time would expire.

After treatment, however, she began feeling healthy, remarried, and considered returning but could not bring herself to face the professors she had been ignoring. Lifting her head, she remembered opening her mailbox and reading Sherri’s personal invitation to return. This simple letter symbolized hope, an opportunity to begin again. She responded, and Sherri helped her resume doctoral studies.

Laura shared how facing death pointed her to authentic research methods, opening a space for her to explore the meaning of her life as a middle school teacher. Preparing her dissertation, she decided to conduct an ethnography of middle school classroom life. Defending her dissertation, some faculty, she told the group, sought to block her study, claiming her inquiry existed outside positivist norms and advanced ungeneralizable data.

The workshop’s participants leaned in as Laura described obstacles she called, “unnecessary oversights,” enacted by reviewers seeking to force her dissertation inside “a black and white box” and “into a mold.” Reaching the climax of her story, Laura explained how she persevered with Sherri’s help, gaining personal and professional satisfaction from her research. Laura showed the students how she came to understand her resistance: her near death

experience empowered her to choose qualitative inquiry instead of acquiescing to cultural norms.

Our collective workshop experience opened reflective spaces for understanding the narratives of becoming doctoral candidates, researchers, and mentors. Laura drew her peers into her story, and they began sharing their experiences and hopes. After the workshop ended, we found ourselves casually chatting with many of the lingering attendees, exploring the dynamic power of narrative interviewing. Stepping away from the workshop, we noticed Laura and her listeners were sorting out what they wanted and did not want their own doctoral sojourns. Perhaps unaware, they were looking for models to live by, and Laura storied one. They especially noted how Laura's perseverance and Sherri's willingness to resist methodological traditions illustrated an unprecedented act of collective courage.

Reflecting-In-Action

Donald Schön's (1983) philosophy of reflection-in-action stems from Dewey's notion of reflective inquiry. Dewey (1990) argues reflective inquiry occurs as cooperative acts within social environments, enabling individuals to transact through reflective, self-conscious thought. Dewey's (1910) early associations with educational psychology, articulated in his well-known book *How We Think*, however, spawns Schön (1983) to critique Dewey for embracing scientific rationalism (Hébert, 2015).¹

Revising Dewey's (1910) reflective inquiry, Schön (1983) aligns theory with practice, characterizing reflection-in-action as an "on-the-spot experiment" (Schön, 1983, p. 28), designed to address emerging problems by restructuring courses of action. Because Schön (1983) emphasizes reflection within the time and space of acting, Schön sees a thinking/doing interrelationship between knowledge and inquiry processes, allowing complex thought processes to become visible. Schön argues the following:

He [learner] does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. Thus, reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty or uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality. (p. 69)

Reflection-in-action connects learners to what they know (knowing-in-action) yet often fail to articulate. Removing barriers of technical rationality, reflection-in-action facilitates continual experimentation and enables qualitative inquiry learners to respond more authentically within naturalistic contexts. Most importantly, reflection-in-action, if wisely implemented, fosters productive reflexivity from researchers who learn from themselves while learning from others.

Traditionally, many seminal educational theorists define and situate reflection within the context of rational problem solving—that is, learners apply knowledge to specific, instrumental decisions, which are not generalizable (Mezirow, 1991). Schön (1983), however, develops an argument against technical rationality, insisting learners reflecting on one case may generalize their knowledge to other cases. He couples thoughtful action with reflection, characterizing thinking as a process of knowing, granting learners intuitive powers to create new variations from any theme, idea, and concept deriving from their experiences. Like jazz

¹ In contrast to Schön, we perceive Dewey as an evolving philosopher; therefore, we advocate reviewing the full breadth of Dewey's works, revealing Dewey's views of progressive education and inquiry as transformative change agents for individuals and society (Campbell, 1995; Stoller, 2018).

musicians who draw upon a vast musical schema, Schön (1983) advocates, learners draw upon repertoires of knowledge, improvising new perspectives, understandings, and meanings while they practice reflection-in-action.

Although Schön (1983) directs ideas toward practitioners, we perceive Schön's philosophy useful for teaching qualitative inquiry, especially when teachers illuminate the thought processes of their students. For example, a typical lesson or workshop might begin with a qualitative teacher recreating an inquiry experience and inviting others to dialogically interact. The teachers and learners, orchestrating reflection-in-action, become immersed in discussions about their prior experiences, including how those experiences differ or align with the inquiry (Schön, 1983). As the lesson progresses, the teacher continually invites students to reflect-in-action, paying careful attention to complexities, hidden meanings, and narrative threads. Additionally, Schön (1983) urges experimenters to continually re-reflect on challenges and opportunities, re-constructing inquiry experiences using new actions, a process he terms "reflection-on-action."

For Schön (1987), reflection-in-action becomes potent through repeated experiences of thinking and doing, enabling skillful actions and understandings, a process Schön calls the "reflective practicum." The reflective practicum enables students to adapt to challenging circumstances and to embrace new discoveries; thus, wise teachers and students continually consider their values and espoused theories, noting if their espoused theories match their practices (Aubrey & Riley, 2018). In the qualitative classroom, the teacher encourages learners to re-visualize inquiry processes by rethinking phenomena, probing possibilities, and affirming or disputing assumptions. Moreover, the teacher and learners engage in shared, playful explorations—all the while linking their thoughts to their actions.

Helping students become qualitative inquirers through the reflective practicum, teachers enact Dewey's (1990) transactional ontology of experience, or the creative, evolving self within social environments (Stoller, 2018). For Dewey (1990), the wise practice of reflective inquiry enables individuals to become more ethically evolved individuals who transform society in constructive ways (Campbell, 1995). In this way, teachers join Dewey (1938, 1990) in assuming a critical reflective stance, enabling moral transformations of the self and society by reflecting on and about situational problems. By extension, they engage in purposeful, reflective inquiry through an ongoing process of experimenting, innovating, and evolving as human beings within collaborative societies, inviting students into this vibrant learning space.

Narrating-In-Action

According to Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990), narrative constitutes a way of thinking, a way of capturing and organizing deep structures of human experience. Bruner (1990) distinguishes two modes of thought: the paradigmatic logico-scientific mode, defined as "attempt[ing] to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation" (p. 12), and the narrative mode, defined as "deal[ing] in human and human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course" (p. 13). The narrative mode allows narrators to capture and organize human motivations and actions, but unlike the paradigmatic logico-scientific mode, narrative enables inquirers to reach beyond categories and to understand the human condition. Narrative strengthens inquiry, by discoursing rather than reporting, intuiting rather than prescribing, and understanding rather than predicting outcomes. Moreover, storytelling uniquely invites narrators to imagine possibilities or what Bruner (1986) calls "possible castles" (p. 45) and "possible worlds" (p. 45).

For Bruner (1990), understanding humanity through storytelling begins with delving into individuals' intentional states, including their experiences and responses, which human beings communicate via participation in "symbolic systems of culture" (p. 33). As a representative form, narrative showcases these symbolic systems through verisimilitude, capturing and organizing lived experience as authentically as possible. Accordingly, narrative possesses the landscape of action (plot, character, time, and setting) and the landscape of consciousness (characters' internal states). Using these landscapes, narrators continuously refigure human experience through "emplotment," defined by Polkinghorne (1988) as the cognitive process of organizing human experience into episodes (plot) that construct a coherent and understandable whole.

Narrative constructs representations of reality, the appearance of true or real experiences, not actual experiences, representing life as an art thus creating new life worlds. As Polkinghorne (1988) explains, narrative refigures human experience because humans cannot escape new experiences which continuously shape their understandings. As human experience is always new, never fixed, narrative utilizes the landscapes of action and consciousness to highlight human actions, directing narrators and readers to focus on an infinite interplay of human beings' performances (actions) and intentions, defined as consciousness within cultural contexts (Polkinghorne, 1988). This explains why individuals often become the narratives they tell themselves through constructing and practicing internal dialogues (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 2008), and it explains why narrative transforms human behavior.

As portals to life, narratives offer learners powerful pedagogical lenses for perceiving and understanding qualitative inquiry processes, including the ways in which learners perceive themselves as inquirers. Extending Schön's ideas (1983), we crafted a new pedagogical term, "narrating-in-action," defined as constructing and understanding narratives in the moment, or as the narrative unfolds in live settings. For example, a teacher invites the interviewer, the interviewee, and the students into a shared space of narrative construction. This process yields opportunities for understanding the acts of narrating and inquiring while practicing the craft. Accordingly, narrating-in-action reveals the intentional states of those participating in the learning process, which they refigure into new narratives, new possibilities.

Referring to narrative's acculturating power, Bruner (1990) finds human life often assumes the shape of the stories people tell about themselves, stories reflecting cultural systems. Narrating a cultural system helps learners understand their interpretations of people, places, and choices shaping their experiences, but it also helps them reimagine and reshape their interpretations. Narrative, therefore, provides a viable form for transmitting cultural systems by fostering understanding of themselves and others through character, setting, and action. Narrating-in-action enables teachers and learners, inquirers and participants to co-construct narrative plots reflecting their understandings and manifest them through new pedagogical experiences.

Enacting Narrative Interviewing

Enacting live narrative interviews, teachers and students participate in dialogue, narrating-in-action and linking their thinking and doing to imaginative possibilities. The live narrative interview invites students into the processes of narrative construction and meaning making. Preparing for the narrative interview experience, Sherri sought to explore the intersection of Laura's life, a space where personal experiences encountered academic and professional experiences.

Accordingly, Sherri and Laura met prior to the workshop to discuss their aims but not Sherri's questions, enabling Laura to respond authentically. Sherri used Rubin and Rubin's (2012) guidelines for structuring interviews to create a collection of main questions and follow-

up probes, ranging from basic questions about Laura's external self to probing questions about her inner thoughts and feelings. Relying on narrative's inherent structure (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), Sherri chronologically ordered her questions according to Laura's experiences by initially exploring Laura's origins, examining tensions and conflicts, inquiring about turning points, highlighting positive experiences, and finally asking Laura to reflect on her post-graduation research. Sherri asked the following questions: Why did you choose to conduct a qualitative study? Why did you choose a particular methodology of qualitative inquiry? How did you analyze your data? How did you write your qualitative study?

As the interview unfolded, Laura traced her battle with cancer, her return to doctoral studies after chemotherapy, and her perseverance in pursuing an ethnographic dissertation. Laura resented some faculty and administrators' strong bias against qualitative methodologies; for this reason, she hesitated to propose her study, fearing unnecessary roadblocks from others, ignorant or intolerant of qualitative methods. Some faculty and administrators inaccurately critiqued her methodology, claiming she failed to gather and present generalizable data. Even worse, a few frustrated faculty members, struggling to understand her inquiry process and the nature of ethnographic research, began accusing her of rebelling against university traditions.

During Laura's narration, Sherri invited students to dialogically participate in these tensions, relying on questions found in the model lesson within this article. When the students responded, commented, or asked additional questions, Sherri noticed how they respected Laura's narrative form but relied on quantitative terms to describe how Laura's research related to their projects. For example, students often described qualitative studies using numerical surveys, generating percentages, or counting frequencies. When these misunderstandings occurred, Sherri politely explained how qualitative data differ from quantitative data. Rather than allowing students to perpetuate inaccurate, conflated perspectives such as qualitative research is the same as quantitative research, she focused their discussion on strategies the students were immediately using to understand Laura's interview. This process encouraged them to reflect on their assumptions and consider acting outside the rules and procedures of quantitative training.

Likewise, narrative interviewing gave Laura the means to understand qualitative inquiry processes while helping herself become a stronger qualitative inquirer. By performing the interview live—students observing and participating in the process—Laura invited her audience into her story, invoking narrating-in-action, or being within the narrative and the action, akin to Bruner's (1990) entrance into meaning making via story. Laura perceived her inquiry experience “not just as a dissertation but as a process of overcoming.” Her awakening occurred in-between spaces: recovering from cancer, returning to teach elementary school, beginning a new marriage, and re-encountering her lifeworld as a doctoral student.

Reflecting on the workshop, Laura characterized her experience “empowering” because it “gave even more meaning to the work that [she] had done, through the experience that [she] had.” By “losing [her]self to gain understanding” (Freeman, 2017, p. 941), Laura reconfigured herself, re-interpreting her personal and academic lives. As Ricoeur (1984, 1992) explains, narrative identity transforms self-identity through surprises, detours, and unexpected moments when oneself encounters the other via new horizons of difference, “namely the dialectic of *self* and *other than self*” (1992, p. 3). Reflecting on the workshop challenged Laura to re-examine her perceptions, including becoming a qualitative inquirer.

After the workshop, participants lingered and chatted, connecting Laura's experiences to their own. Several participants said Laura's story helped them envision themselves becoming qualitative researchers. Laura showed gratitude: “The adults were engaged, curious about me, the things that I did. They were leaning forward in their seats, head nods. The participants described the workshop as “inspiring,” “helpful,” and “relevant.” One participant shared, “This

was my favorite one [workshop],” as she explained how the lesson enabled her to see herself becoming a burgeoning qualitative inquirer. Another participant appreciated the co-collaborative process of narrative building, describing herself becoming like “Dr. Laura and Dr. Colby (Sherri).”

Learning alongside Laura and the students, we developed an appreciation for reflecting-in-action and narrating-in-action, acts enabling adult learners to reconstruct their ways of thinking. In a unique way, narrating-in-action enabled the workshop’s participants to co-construct their narratives alongside Laura, learning in the moment, developing fresh understandings of qualitative research and themselves. We call this process “becoming-in-action”: the transformative, transactional acts of recurrently renewing ourselves as we reflect and narrate our teaching and learning experiences. The workshop experience opened a space for us to explore and even facilitate transformative learning for graduate students.

Since our workshop, we continue pondering how to wisely teach adult learners qualitative inquiry processes. We ask ourselves this question: How do we facilitate reflecting-in-action and becoming-in-action for our students? In response to this question, we crafted a lesson plan, which Sherri currently uses with her doctoral students.

Lesson for Narrative Interviewing In-Action

DESCRIPTION

This lesson invites students to co-construct a narrative interviewing experience. The lesson emphasizes reflection-in-action about the interviewee, narrative construction, and narrative meaning making.

INTENTIONS

Students will reflect about a narrative interview before, during, and after the experience.

Students will think about narrative construction and narrative meaning making. Students will consider possibilities for their ontological growth as qualitative inquirers.

PREPARATION

The teacher invites a recently graduated student (or experienced researcher) to an interview. The interview can be audio or video recorded, and recordings can be used in future lessons on transcription and data analysis.

TIME FRAME: Approximately 2 ½ - 3 hours.

ACTIVITY

The teacher invites students to create an identity card using a 4”x6” note card. On one side, the students will write their personal interests, needs, and concerns as adult learners studying qualitative research. As the interview proceeds, students may continue to write questions or note pertinent insights using additional notecards or paper.

The teacher interviews the interviewee following a narrative form. As desired, the teacher may pause the interview and allow the students to query the interviewee and interviewer. Also, the teacher may ask one or two students to write ideas/ notes on the board during the process.

Beginnings: Describe the beginnings of your educational journey. Describe your first encounters with qualitative methods. Why did you choose to pursue qualitative inquiry? Or a particular qualitative study?

Tensions and Conflicts: Describe a moment of tension during your educational journey or research experiences. What conflicts did you encounter along your educational or research journey? How did you negotiate the tensions (or conflicts) that you experienced?

Motivating Experiences: Describe a motivating experience as a qualitative researcher or learner? What experiences produced positive changes for you as a learner or researcher? Who (or what) influenced you and the development of your ideas?

Intersections: How did you negotiate the responsibilities or tensions of your academic life with your personal life? How did your personal life influence your academic life? How did your academic life influence your personal life?

The other(s): What were your memorable experiences in interacting with others (faculty, peers, etc.)? How did those experiences influence you?

Climax or Turning Points: At what point, did you make a commitment (or renew your commitment) to your goals? When did you see yourself at the highest point (climax) of your educational endeavors? When did you experience a shift in your thinking? In your practices? In what ways, have you changed as a researcher or learner?

Resolution: At what moment, did your academic work crystallize? Describe the closing events of your most recent educational journey or research endeavor.

Post-narrative: Reflecting on your prior experiences, what insights can you offer at this time? What might you change? What would you keep the same? What would you enhance? What do you see yourself doing in the future? What metaphor and/or symbol would you use to describe your experiences?

Question and answer: During interview, the students may ask follow-up questions of either the interviewee or the interviewer. For instance, the teacher may generate students' questions using simple prompts: What did you notice during the interview? What did you notice about the interviewee? What did notice about the interviewer? Why did you attend to certain aspects of the interview? What else do you want to hear about from the interviewee?

POST- REFLECTION

The teacher directs students to write their perceptions of studying qualitative research on the back of their identity cards. As desired, the conversations could occur in small groups or with the whole class.

Ask the students to list salient words or phrases from the interview. The teacher may choose to model this action, by selecting a word or phrase, describing the

word or phrase, and then offering an interpretative insight. Example prompts offer opportunities for further exploration.

After observing the teacher analyze a section of data, what ideas resonated with you? What did you learn from watching me interact with the data?

What word/concept/event stands out as an overarching symbol or theme of the interview? What metaphor or symbol might you use to represent the narrative?

Given what you wrote on your card and the interview you observed today, how has your perception of qualitative research evolved?

What specific moments/aspects of the interview resonated with you?

How has this interview impacted you as a qualitative inquirer?

After completing this reflection, the teacher invites the students to synthesize their ideas by combining like words and phrases, attending to anomalies and powerful ideas. The teacher may invite the students to craft story boards, including setting/ context, people, action, turning points, climax, and epilogue.

EXTENSIONS

Write a collection of found or generated poems, using the interview recording and/or transcript.

Create artistic representations of the data, such as paintings, drawings, three-dimensional visual constructions, musical arrangements, or another choice.

Re-analyze the data using a different qualitative method, such as grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, or another choice.

Based on several years of experience using this plan, we offer insights for other instructors who might choose to implement the plan. We find the lesson to be beneficial in both live and video conferencing sessions. During live classes, we prefer to use highly visible mediums, such as butcher paper, a docucam, or the whiteboard, for students to participate in the post-reflective discussion. During video conferencing classes, we organize the class members into breakout rooms for the post-reflection discussion.

We encourage teachers to determine the interview length based on their students' interest and the time available. When conducting a short interview (less than 20 minutes), we wait until the end of the interview before inviting student dialogue; for longer interviews (one hour), we pause about every 15 to 20 minutes. In the past, we recorded longer interviews for future data analysis lessons; however, we found our students apathetic toward analyzing the original data. Like Schön (1983) advocates, our students show more motivation and engagement in the moment, specifically during and immediately after the interview.

As teachers, we seek to establish an open, inclusive learning environment, demonstrating respect for differing research methodologies (including quantitative), which we perceive encourages student participation. Within this climate, our students usually respond eagerly to participating and commenting during and after the interview. Although not all students seek to be interviewers or interviewees, most students do contribute to the dialogue.

On occasion, we encounter initial resistance from a quantitatively-oriented student, but often, once the interview proceeds, this student usually softens and participates in the discussion.

When working with a group of students who know each other well, we find the narrative interview occasionally evolves into local discussions unfamiliar to the other students and the teacher. When working with unacquainted students, we encourage the interviewer to first establish rapport with the interviewee at the beginning of the interview. Reflecting on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, we often ask the class members, “How does knowing or not knowing the interviewee influence the way the interviewer asks questions? And how does this relationship influence the interviewee’s responses?”

We find the primary challenge with the lesson centers on students’ confidence with analyzing and interpreting data; thus, to ameliorate discomfort, we recommend teachers model thought processes. During the post-reflection discussion, Sherri models reflecting-in-action with her students, then invites them to reflect immediately afterwards. Sherri will often share, “Not knowing where this is going, what the data fully mean is part of the angst of qualitative research. We need to learn to become comfortable with discomfort. With repeated reflection, the data eventually crystallize.” Often, our students’ confidence relative to interacting with qualitative data improves after one practice session.

During and after the lesson, Sherri’s students often reflect out-loud regarding their orientations to qualitative inquiry and articulate possibilities for their dissertation research. Their explorations tend to capture their researcher identities and professional goals as they repeatedly reflect out-loud with comments such as, “Wow, I did not know there could be so many layers of thought,” or “This is qualitative? I think I can do this,” or “I see the value of qualitative for my research study.”

Moreover, our students seek to understand how qualitative inquiry relates to their professional needs as self-directed learners, a pattern typifying adult learners’ motivations for knowing (Knowles et. al., 2020). For instance, Sherri’s students usually want to know the answers to three overarching questions: (1) How well am I performing? (2) Where am I going (with a dissertation)? (3) How does this methodology relate to my professional goals? Their constant need to answer these questions usually drives their reflections before, during, and after the lesson. Notably, the students verbalize their emerging perceptions of qualitative inquiry, first by summarizing what they observed and then by drawing a connection to themselves and their academic work. In essence, Sherri’s students continually engage in subjective reframing (Mezirow, 2000), applying the interviewee’s narrative and the interview experience to their evolving conceptions of themselves and their academic work.

Conclusion

Teaching narrative interviewing using reflective practices enables students to reflect out-loud, on-site, and in the moment regarding their summations, perceptions, and understandings of qualitative inquiry processes and themselves as burgeoning researchers. Expanding Schön’s (1983) reflective practicum, we ascertain the acts of reflecting-in-action and narrating-in-action, if wisely applied, energize becoming-in-action. Accordingly, we find wise reflective narrative practice emboldens us to continuously re-evaluate our teaching methods, foster our students’ understandings, and help us grow alongside our students. In so doing, we invite our readers to learn with us—reflecting, narrating, and becoming-in-action.

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