Qualitative Data Analysis Retreats: Creating New Spaces for Doctoral Student Analytic Work

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Abstract
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Keywords
qualitative research, data analysis, retreat, doctoral education, threshold concepts

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Creating New Spaces for Doctoral Student Analytic Work

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Qualitative data analysis is recognized as a threshold concept in research education and can be conceptually challenging for doctoral students. While retreats are common approaches to support dissertation writing, we propose an unconventional approach for doctoral education with the use of retreats for qualitative data analysis. Analytic autoethnography was used to examine what features of an off-campus retreat supported data analysis of dissertation research. With the use of a focused agenda, the retreat space offered opportunities for icebreakers to stimulate synthesis thinking, student-led analytic activities, and reflective writing. Data were collected from documents, analytic artifacts, photographs, and reflective journals. We identified three themes pertaining to retreat features to support qualitative analytic work: Analytic Immersion, Analytic Support, and Analytic Reflection. Findings suggest that retreat spaces can be used to support doctoral students navigating the challenges of knowledge acquisition associated with qualitative data analysis. We recommend four key considerations when designing a qualitative analysis retreat: (1) create a space for analytic immersion; (2) design activities to cultivate student agency; (3) situate faculty for optimal student mentoring and support; and (4) allocate time and space reflective practice. This paper contributes to the ongoing conversation of threshold concepts in doctoral education and offers a new approach for supporting students during data analysis.

\textbf{Keywords:} qualitative research, data analysis, retreat, doctoral education, threshold concepts

\section*{Introduction}

Meyer and Land’s (2003, 2005) threshold concepts framework posits that there are concepts critical to understanding disciplinary knowledge. Initially used with engineering students, the framework has been useful to a variety of disciplines to better understand teaching and learning of critical concepts. Described as “akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking,” mastery of threshold concepts represents transformed ways of knowing and understanding (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 412). However, when learners encounter unfamiliar knowledge, they enter spaces of liminality where they oscillate between old and emerging ways of understanding disciplinary knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2005). Thus, some learners may find threshold concepts challenging and get “stuck” in their learning (Meyer & Land, 2005). While threshold concepts were initially used to examine learning among undergraduates, they have also been helpful in identifying critical concepts in doctoral research education (Kiley, 2009; Kiley & Wisker 2009; Trafford & Lesham, 2009). Specifically, data analysis has been identified as a threshold concept and is considered one of
the “major conceptual challenges” doctoral students experience (Kiley & Wisker, 2009, p. 439). Notably, analysis of qualitative data presents its own set of challenges for students as they work to capture or record data; manage and code large amounts of data; and/or write up their findings (Humphrey & Simpson, 2012; Li & Seale, 2007).

Various strategies to support doctoral students with their qualitative data analyses have been reported. For example, integrating software programs within methods courses has been effective in teaching analytic practice (Schmieder, 2020). Other scholars have found competency-based approaches (Haughton, 2023), collaborative co-learning models (Abboud et al., 2017), and cognitive apprenticeships (Exter & Ashby, 2019) effective in supporting doctoral students during qualitative analyses. Captivated by these innovative strategies, we were interested in the use of retreats as a pedagogical strategy to build student capacity for analysis of qualitative data. In doctoral education, retreats have been mostly used to support students in the writing phases of their research (Davis et al., 2016; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Papen & Thériault, 2018; Quynn & Stewart, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021). Here, we share how we reimagined traditional approaches for the use of retreats in doctoral education and created a new retreat space to support the analytic phase of research.

Designing Our Retreat

Our journey started with Deby (research mentor) proposing a retreat as a strategy to Mitzi (doctoral student) as a strategy to offer support during the analytic phase of her dissertation. With intrigue and excitement, Mitzi agreed to participate. Unable to find published literature describing retreats used for data analyses, we used articles describing writing retreats to guide our design. We found that most retreats occurred over two to three days (Papen & Thériault, 2018; Quynn & Stewart, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2022) and ranged from a one-day (Davis et al., 2016) to a five-day retreat (Locke & Boyle, 2016). They were held on-campus (Locke & Boyle, 2016; Papen & Thériault, 2018; Quynn & Stewart, 2021) or off-campus at hotel conference centers (Davis et al., 2016), private residences (Williams & Todd, 2016), or natural settings such as recreational areas (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2022). The retreats included intensive writing sessions with daily goal sharing and sharing of progress (Papen & Thériault, 2018; Quynn & Stewart, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021) recharging activities (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2022), and time for one-on-one coaching (Locke & Boyle, 2016). We were particularly intrigued by Williams and Todd’s (2016) account of their writing retreat to support Williams after an inadequate dissertation defense. Special attention was given to providing a safe space for rewriting, in which mutual trust and respect allowed Williams to critically reanalyze her findings. We were particularly inspired by their commitment to the risk-taking required to explore alternative approaches, as well as Williams’s willingness as a doctoral student to be vulnerable during the process. While the impetus for our retreat was not in response to an inadequate defense, their story validated our notion to explore an unconventional approach for its applicability for doctoral education.

Our analytic retreat was held in January 2021 over a span of two and a half days. We selected an off-campus site situated within a coastal setting to facilitate an immersive experience with limited interruptions. The agenda consisted of icebreakers to stimulate synthesis thinking, student-led analytic activities, and reflective writing sessions (see Table 1 below).

The retreat was attended by the two authors, in addition to a second faculty member serving on Mitzi’s dissertation committee. Our intention with this paper is to contribute to the ongoing conversation of threshold concepts in doctoral education, specifically about conceptually challenging knowledge related to qualitative data analysis. Understanding conceptually challenging knowledge students encounter can offer insights into new approaches
to effectively assist them with navigating the liminal spaces associated with conducting data analysis. The purpose of this study is to identify retreat features that support student analytic work and gain insights on the applicability of data analysis retreats in doctoral education.

**Table 1: Data Retreat Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m. Activity</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. Activity</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. Dinner</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. Breakfast</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 p.m. Reconnecting</td>
<td>9:00 a.m. Icebreaker</td>
<td>9:00 a.m. Icebreaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the Data</td>
<td>Synthesis Thinking</td>
<td>Synthesis Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 p.m. Quiet Time /</td>
<td>9:15 a.m. Goal Setting for the Day</td>
<td>9:15 a.m. Goal Setting for the Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 a.m. <strong>Student-Led</strong></td>
<td>9:30 a.m. <strong>Student-Led</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Activities</td>
<td>Analytic Activities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 p.m. Lunch &amp;</td>
<td>12:00 p.m. Lunch &amp; Socialization</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 a.m. Icebreaker</td>
<td>1:00 a.m. Rejuvenation Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synthesis Thinking</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:15 p.m. <strong>Student-Led</strong></td>
<td>1:15 p.m. <strong>Student-Led</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic Activities</td>
<td>Analytic Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m. Reflective Writing</td>
<td>3:00 p.m. Reflective Writing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3:30 p.m. Afternoon Excursion</td>
<td>3:30 p.m. Celebratory Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. Dinner</td>
<td>4:00 p.m. Departure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 p.m. Quiet Time /</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reflection</td>
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</table>

**Method**

Autoethnography, a combination of autobiography and ethnography, describes how researchers write about their personal experiences by being a part of a particular culture (Ellis et al., 2011). In particular, analytic autoethnography as described by Anderson (2006), was used as a framework by two authors to capture our understanding of a sociocultural phenomenon from a dual lens of both members of a group under investigation and researchers. Analytic ethnography entails engagement with analytic reflexivity and introspection of the ethnographers. Understanding transcends beyond the personal experience and “insider’s
perspective” to provide insight into broader social contexts (Anderson, 2006, p. 386). We chose analytic autoethnography as a method to build upon earlier work identifying threshold concepts in doctoral students (Tyndall et al., 2021a; Tyndall et al., 2021b). This autoethnographic lens supported our ability to share insights on the applicability of data analysis retreats in doctoral education while considering the relational and structural nuances embedded within the context of doctoral education. The two authors comprise the participants for this study; we begin by sharing our views and position.

**Researcher Positionality**

The first author, who was five years post-dissertation at the time of the retreat, has witnessed doctoral students in liminal spaces (similar to her own) when analyzing qualitative data. Witnessing these interruptions in students’ learning, she began to reimagine new approaches to support students during this phase of the dissertation. Her worldview is centered on the assumption that doctoral students thrive when exposed to opportunities which foster student agency and researcher positioning. She believes that students should not be positioned as outsiders when they begin to situate themselves as scholars within the research community.

The second author was a doctoral student at the time of the retreat who was in the final stages of her dissertation. Mitzi’s originally planned dissertation study was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the months leading up to the retreat, she had been navigating recruitment delays and pivoting data collection methods. Mitzi had previous experience with the collection of qualitative data and analyses as a research assistant, so the idea of a retreat generated an excited anticipation.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Our retrospective collection of data was guided by autoethnography recommendations from Cooper and Lilyea (2022). Data sources consisted of artifacts (i.e., retreat planning notes, agenda, e-mail correspondence photographs) and written journals which captured observations and reflection. Similar to others, observational and reflective data contributed to the process of co-constructing shared experiences (e.g., Elliott et al., 2019; Logue-Conroy et al., 2021; McPhail-Bell & Redman-MacLaren, 2019).

An initial coding scheme was created by the first author after familiarizing herself with the data. We began with descriptive coding of journal entries and artifacts containing text. Data sources without text (i.e., photographs) were discussed and summarized to create text for coding (Glaw et al., 2017). Descriptive coding was used for first cycle coding because of its appropriateness for ethnographies (Saldaña, 2021). Coding occurred separately, then collaboratively, with introducing new codes and revising existing codes until consensus was reached (Nowell et al., 2017). This process generated a revised version of the codebook which was used for focused coding during the second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2021). Our continued immersion in the data during focused coding facilitated the emergence of co-created meaning from the passages of each data source. A condensed group of codes or categories were developed based on agreement about those that were most significant or frequently occurring and used to create three separate Venn diagrams. Venn diagrams were used for thematic analysis and provided visual representations of a trinity configuration depicting the overarching themes most significant to each researcher (Saldaña, 2021). A gallery walk (McConnell et al., 2017) around each Venn diagram allowed the group to discuss at length meanings that evolved as similarities and comparisons were made. Through ongoing reflection and analysis, final themes were generated, representing key features of retreat design.
Cooper and Lilyea (2022) discuss the challenge of “seeing” when researchers analyze their own data (p. 200). Thus, we took special considerations for data collection and analysis employing both data and investigator triangulation to provide quality control and trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of the data was strengthened throughout data collection and analysis by ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Guba, 1981). The autoethnographic context of this study, while specific and individualistic to our experiences, supports transferability as the analytic retreat is subject to fittingness within other contexts. We provided rich descriptions of the setting and characteristics of members to aid other researchers in determining transferability to their contexts. Credibility was enhanced by conducting member checks consisting of constant comparison of individual and joint sources of data as we co-created the meaning of each data source in a circular fashion until consensus was reached. An audit trail of reflective notes, physical artifacts containing researcher memos, labeled photographs, and coding tables provided tracking for optimum dependability. Autobiographical components of the study reflect participants’ standing within the context and among the team at the time of the retreat. Such reflexivity provided us the opportunity to contemplate and acknowledge our assumptions as we endeavored to minimize biases and enhance dependability. Additionally, the triangulation of multiple sources of data further enhanced trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

As the data included our own narratives and sources that were researcher-generated, this study did not require institutional review board approval. Yet, we considered the ethical aspects of our work. We began by exploring the stories of other autoethnographers who shared their approaches to ethical practices. We were drawn to relational ethics as described by Ellis (2007) as this type of ethics takes into consideration the experiences of doing research with “intimate others” (p. 5). The authors had a previous collegial relationship which consisted of co-authoring an integrative review and working on other collaborative research projects. At the time of the retreat not only were we intimate others, but we were also conducting research in an intimate space. We carefully considered the vulnerability that each of us brought to this space. While Mitzi was particularly vulnerable as a student participating in the retreat, it’s worth noting that her role had shifted from student to faculty at the time of data analysis for this autoethnography.

Findings

Three themes emerged during analysis that captured our experiences and identified critical elements for designing a qualitative data analysis retreat. These themes included: Analytic Immersion, Analytic Reflection, and Analytic Support. Just as writing retreats provide dedicated time for doctoral students to write, retreats can also create spaces to support their analytic work.

Analytic Immersion

The theme of analytic immersion describes our experiences with being deeply immersed in the process of analyzing data. First, we had to establish a common vision for the retreat. Mitzi took the lead on establishing goals and objectives based on the timeline of her analysis. Since first and second cycle coding were complete, we agreed that the retreat would focus on generating categories and identifying preliminary themes (Retreat Planning Notes,
January 2021). A common vision with specific goals and objectives solidified our experience and contributed to our ability to be deeply immersed in analysis.

Our experiences revealed that structure was a critical design element to promote analytic immersion. A structured agenda (see Table 1) was created prior to the retreat to achieve a mindset conducive to accomplishing dedicated time for analysis. Faculty took on the role of setting a timer and monitoring the schedule to keep the group on track. Duration for the retreat was another critical element to sustain analytic immersion. We were careful to ensure that each of the participants had input regarding the length of the retreat (Emails, December 30, 2020 – January 5, 2021). We found that two and a half days was sufficient to accomplish our goals and objectives and permitted our ability to focus on the creative process.

Another critical element in our retreat design was a demonstration of shared commitment. It was critical for Deby to be mindful of presence and genuinely committed to the process, so she blocked our schedules to minimize, if not eliminate, interruptions. Deby described it as modeling for each other:

I was committed to supporting a positive and rewarding student experience. It was crucial for me to model this commitment, so I cleared my calendar to be mentally and physically present. I wanted to display trust and respect to the other participants, but more importantly, I wanted to be engaged and able to fully contribute to the experience... (Deby’s Reflective Journal, January 2021).

Understanding that retreats in serene surroundings contribute to immersion and facilitate committed work by participants, similar to others we opted for a calming environment (Davis et al., 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Grant, 2006). During analysis, cell phones were muted, emails unchecked, and social media was ignored.

As our analytic processes evolved, interdependence and a safe space among members seemed to develop, contributing to our immersive experience. Mutual respect and collegiality among participants were helpful in enhancing Mitzi’s comfort in sharing analytic insights without fear of criticism. We engaged in analytic activities which required us to share thoughts and ideas (Retreat Photos, January 2021). Through interactive activities within a space of trust, we developed a shared energy and enthusiasm about the work stimulating creative intensity. We also engaged in social activities (e.g., planning and preparing meals) which promoted a sense of collegiality. The interrelatedness between the social and analytic activities created a duality of spaces. This allowed us the space to re-charge away from the analytic work, but seamlessly reengage with the analysis when we stepped back into the workspace.

**Analytic Reflection**

The theme, analytic reflection, describes our experiences of using reflection to support Mitzi’s analysis. Reflective periods were supported by the trusting and supportive space that had evolved between us. Mitzi was encouraged to engage in solitary reflective periods as we felt this would be a valuable use of time. We knew it would be conducive to contemplation about the analysis and promote a deeper understanding of the findings as they emerged. Reflective periods were helpful for Mitzi in bridging the gap between trying to make sense of the overwhelming amount of data that often accompanies qualitative data analysis and gaining clarity about the meaning of the words. Because of the comfort level between us, Mitzi felt at ease stepping away and seeking time alone to gather her thoughts about the analysis and prepare for the next session. Mitzi felt that as a student, reflective periods were important aspects of the analytic process.
For me, this was an essential part of the analysis as it allowed me further immersion into the data but in a solitary way. It was a way for me to ground myself deeply in the data and the experience… If I had been forced to interact with faculty during those times, I feel certain the analysis and immersive experience would have been weakened. (Mitzi’s Reflective Journal, Date 2021).

Understanding that faculty have a crucial role in facilitating student development of analytic research skills, it was essential for Deby to also reflect on analytic practices. Reflective periods were helpful for her as they provided an opportunity to reflect on further actions or strategies that were needed to provide continued guidance for Mitzi. She noted in her reflective journal:

I also benefited from the daily scheduled reflective writing sessions. Taking the time to pause and reflect on my own teaching and mentoring practices brought about in-the-moment awareness and assessment of the attainment of retreat goals. (January 2021).

Reflection was facilitated through journaling and in-the-moment reflection during student-led analytic activities. Reflective journaling was incorporated into our retreat agenda (see Table 1) to provide us with dedicated time and space to reflect on Mitzi’s analysis. Dedicated time for reflective writing, scheduled at the end of each day, encouraged us to temporarily disengage with the data by creating a space for thinking. We chose the location for reflective journaling, whether it was alone in our rooms or outside communing with nature. Given the intense period of time spent engaged in analytic analysis, reflective periods were essential in helping Mitzi avoid pitfalls in the process of data analysis that may have weakened the process.

**Analytic Support**

The theme, *analytic support*, describes our experiences with strategies that supported student agency during the retreat. Deby met with Mitzi a few weeks before the retreat to co-create an agenda and provide her with guidance to lead the retreat. As Deby noted in her reflective journal,

I wanted to support an atmosphere where the student could build researcher voice and agency…there was also this unique opening to create a space where the student could develop skills as an independent scholar through collaboration and leadership. Thus, I tried to be mindful and intentional in my actions and behaviors to support the development of student agency. (January 2021).

Student agency was supported by having student-led activities as the driving force for the analytic process. Student-led activities included preparing daily and overall goals, leading thematic analysis activities and providing handouts to support the activities. This was particularly empowering for Mitzi who wrote in her reflective journal:

Responsibility for preparing and leading the activities ignited a sense of ownership and control of the analytic process while allowing for collaboration among our team. The support by faculty to promote student agency facilitated the development of my identity and positioning within the researcher community. (2021).
Our retreat was comprised of coaching stances and reciprocal learning approaches to support conceptual challenges with data analysis and interpretation. Coaching stances, facilitated by critical thinking prompts, supported metacognitive thinking and supported Mitzi’s development of student agency. This led to Mitzi’s enhanced confidence in leading a creative analytic activity which included the use of Venn diagrams (Retreat photos, January 2021). This was a unique and reciprocal learning experience for both faculty as we had not previously used this approach to analysis.

Analytic support by Deby was promoted by engendering a mutual respect of boundaries and roles. Shared decision-making was encouraged to avoid Mitzi feeling minimized. There was also a tolerance for flexibility during the retreat, meaning that it was acceptable, and encouraged if agenda items needed to be moved, added, or deleted. We were attentive to carving out down-time and socialization opportunities during the retreat to support balance and self-care. As Deby reflected on her own experiences in completing her dissertation, she wanted to provide Mitzi with adequate mentorship prior to the retreat so she felt supported in designing a retreat agenda.

In 2015, I was on my own dissertation journey and…while I had meetings every couple of weeks with my faculty mentor, I recall feeling isolated and doubting my analytic processes… Often times my analysis would lose momentum while waiting for the reassurance (or constructive feedback) I needed as a novice researcher. (Deby’s Reflective Journal, 2021).

Adequate supervision continued during the retreat to provide the student with additional guidance to navigate liminal spaces.

**Discussion**

Anderson (2006) encourages researchers to use data to gain insights into broader social phenomenon. Of significance to this study, are the findings that build upon earlier work identifying threshold concepts in new PhD students (Tyndall et al., 2021b). In particular, constructing researcher identity and positioning within a research community were identified as conceptual challenges for entry-level doctoral students. In this study, we found that a retreat could offer an analytic space to develop student agency and researcher identity. The design of the retreat, which was heavily focused on student-led activities, also situated Mitzi to experience community positioning as a novice researcher. Just as writing retreats support doctoral students in becoming more prolific and effective writers, retreat designs can also create analytic spaces to transform doctoral students into becoming effective scholars.

As data analysis has been identified as a threshold concept for doctoral students (Kiley & Wesker, 2009), our approach to retreat design has implications for broader considerations of doctoral education. The data analysis retreat provided an opportunity to explore an unconventional approach in how faculty might support doctoral students during their dissertation journey. Findings from this study have implications for the analytic phase of dissertation and offer insight on how retreat spaces might be reimagined. Additionally, these new spaces can offer pedagogical strategies to assist students with navigating liminal spaces associated with threshold concepts of analysis of qualitative data. Based on our findings, we recommend the following design elements for faculty interested in co-creating a data analysis retreat with doctoral students: (1) create a space for analytic immersion; (2) design activities to cultivate student agency; (3) situate faculty for optimal student mentoring and support; and (4) allocate time and space for reflection.
Create a Space for Analytic Immersion

To create a space for analytic immersion, consideration should be given to the structure, duration, and setting of the retreat. A structured agenda can enhance the effectiveness of a retreat and minimize distraction and procrastination (Tremblay-Wray et al., 2021). We recommend that the daily schedule include goal-setting and structured blocks of time for analysis, breaks, and reflection. To facilitate immersion, cell phones should be muted, emails unchecked, and social media ignored. Duration of the retreat should be a joint decision between faculty and students based upon intended goals and should be sufficient to create an immersive experience. We found that two and a half days was adequate to immerse ourselves in the creative process of thematic analysis. We do recommend hosting the retreat after participants are well-acquainted with the data; thus, it may be helpful to have completed coding cycles and/or generated categories. The setting of the retreat should enable participants to immerse themselves mentally and physically in the analytic work. The process of retreating from daily life can be energizing, bolstering productivity (Tremblay-Wray et al., 2021), and we found our calm and peaceful seaside location transcended the work atmosphere and evoked a feeling of separateness from day-to-day work responsibilities (Davis et al., 2016).

It is essential to create a safe space for analytic work when doctoral students are engaging in researcher positioning among senior faculty members. Safe spaces allow doctoral students to potentially expose weaknesses without feeling vulnerable. This can be achieved by developing a sense of community to engage students in different forms of interactions, including social and analytical (Southwood, 2017). The interrelatedness between the social practice and the analytic practice of working within a research community can create the feeling of support and belonging (Stevenson, 2021). The sense of belonging may relieve some of the pressure students experience during the dissertation phase and, instead, foster creativity and analytic insights. While our duality of spaces was created within the context of a seaside off-campus setting, with creativity, dual spaces can be created within other types of settings.

Design Activities to Cultivate Student Agency

Student agency is an important aspect to consider when designing analytic retreats involving doctoral students and faculty. The concept of agency refers to the way one responds to situations based on past experiences, the vision of one’s desired self in the future, and the adaptability to respond to situations satisfactorily within a new context (Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2022). Agency is achieved through individual efforts and engagement with forces within specific situations as one seeks to evolve towards a desired self or new role. Within the context of our retreat, student agency entailed taking a leadership role in creating an agenda, deciding on goals and objectives, and selecting analytic activities. Responsibility for preparing and leading retreat activities can ignite a sense of ownership and control of the analytic process, supporting the development of researcher identity.

The traditional student-faculty relationship is often hierarchical, and faculty have inherent power in the relationship with students (Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Richards & Fletcher, 2020). Thus, faculty must be intentional about cultivating a sense of collegiality and promoting a sense of empowerment within students during the retreat. This begins with encouraging students to take the lead on determining the structure, setting, and duration of the retreat. Doctoral students will likely have other personal and occupational responsibilities, so student-driven decisions on whether they can afford the time, effort, and funds needed for a retreat supports student agency. It is also recommended that students conduct a self-examination regarding comfort in working in closeness with faculty prior to the retreat. Reflection on how past experiences may dictate assumptions about expectations may be helpful.
in enhancing comfort relating to a perceived power differential (Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016). While faculty may have a responsibility to adapt a style conducive to reciprocal decision-making and collaboration, the student is also responsible for introspection and actions that facilitate mutuality. Thus, it is important for both students and faculty to reflect on their comfort level in working within intimate spaces amid a perceived power differential and work towards minimizing discomfort related to hierarchical relationships.

**Situate Faculty for Optimal Student Mentoring and Support**

Faculty can often be too busy with their own teaching, scholarship, and service to set aside adequate time for mentoring student research. Thus, faculty schedules should be blocked to minimize, if not eliminate, interruptions during the retreat. It is also critical for faculty to be mindful of presence and genuinely committed to the process. Mindfulness traits, such as respect, sincerity, and fairness, can facilitate supportive relationships between faculty and doctoral students (Buirski, 2020). Being mindful of ethical principles should also be considered when using non-traditional pedagogy such as immersive retreats. The principle of autonomy and fidelity are especially relevant to doctoral education (Roos et al., 2021). Autonomy can be encouraged by supporting students’ own ideas and being tolerant to differing opinions. This principle was encouraged during our retreat by offering support and consideration for student-led approaches to analysis. Student autonomy was also encouraged by mutually respecting boundaries, roles, and shared decision-making to avoid the student feeling minimized. The principle of fidelity can be upheld by providing adequate supervision and feedback prior, during, and after the retreat. Ongoing supervision and feedback of students is critical to navigate liminal spaces they experience during qualitative data analysis.

Faculty are encouraged to use a coaching stance as a strategy to support conceptual challenges during data analysis. Wilson and James (2021) suggest using coaching questions to clarify student thinking which encourages them to take ownership of the “heaving cognitive lifting” required for a doctorate (p. 351). We created this type of supportive stance using critical thinking prompts which facilitated metacognitive thinking during dedicated reflection time. Additionally, student-led activities during the retreat empowered the student to take the lead role, which is important for students who are close to transitioning toward independent scholarship. We also found that student mentoring and support came in the form of reciprocal learning.

Reciprocal learning approaches have been suggested over traditional hierarchical relationships for faculty mentoring doctoral students (Lindén et al., 2013). Through our personal reflections, we noted mutual learning from both student and faculty perspectives. For example, Venn diagrams were generated during a student-led analytic activity. This was an analytic approach that faculty had not previously used for analysis. In this sense, faculty benefitted from this mutual learning experience in both pedagogical and mentoring development. Similar to Kaur et al. (2021), we found that a reciprocal learning approach supported researcher identity development and community positioning for the student.

**Allocate Time and Space for Reflection**

Retreat agendas should provide students with dedicated time and space to reflect on the current state of their analysis to facilitate the action planning needed to maintain and/or modify an analysis plan. This dedicated time for reflective writing, scheduled at the end of each day, can encourage students to temporarily disengage with the data by creating a space for thinking. As reflective engagement can vary in students, prompting questions can support self-regulation of cognition and metacognitive awareness (Alt & Raichel, 2020). However, unstructured
reflective writing could lead to primarily descriptive entries from students, so semi-structured prompts are recommended for more in-depth critical reflection. Prompts for students might include: What is going well? What activities are facilitating and/or hindering analysis? What adjustments, if any, need to be made in the schedule? What are the next steps to move the analysis forward?

Due to its conceptually challenging nature, qualitative data analysis is often challenging for doctoral students (Humphrey & Simpson, 2012; Wisker, 2018). While not used for assessment and evaluation, some faculty have found the use of a journal valuable for capturing doctoral student critical thinking and metacognition (Draissi et al., 2021). Reflective journals have been particularly beneficial for qualitative data analysis as they can deepen understandings of processes when students are able to capture and navigate their conceptual or methodological struggles (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2012). For students engaging in qualitative research, the use of journaling with reflective prompts has been shown to increase student reflexivity and level of detail (Orange, 2016). Thoughtful and intentional strategies to stimulate metacognition in doctoral students can assist with mastery of threshold concepts related to data analysis, researcher identity, and community positioning.

Faculty also need dedicated time and space during a retreat to reflect on pedagogical practices to build mentoring capacity (Jara, 2020). This time can be spent considering what actions or strategies are needed to provide continued guidance for the student. Prompts for faculty might include: What is going well? What faculty actions or strategies are facilitating and/or hindering analysis? What suggestions, if any, need to be offered? As faculty play a crucial role in facilitating student development of analytic research skills, special attention is needed when mentoring students during a retreat-type format where they are immersed in analysis for an intense period of time. Faculty reflection on practices is essential to helping the student avoid pitfalls in the process of data analysis. In particular for a retreat, faculty reflection can capture insights on whether students are engaging in a systematic approach. To avoid the “trap of an unsystematic analysis,” students need to be engaged in coding, comparison, and identification of themes over a period of time (Oplatka, 2021). While the retreat occurred over a couple of days, an extensive amount of time was spent coding the data prior to the retreat. These earlier activities allowed all team members to become well-acquainted with the data to facilitate the next phase, which included comparative analysis and preliminary thematic constructions during the retreat.

As both faculty and students who embarked on a novel approach to data analysis, we were eager to engage in the “divergent ways of interacting with one another and perceiving the dissertation process for the benefit of a new academia” (Williams & Todd, 2016, p. 2172). Using an autoethnographic approach, we gained insight from our experience of how reimagining retreat spaces can be a strategy to support doctoral students with conceptually challenging knowledge. Specifically, our imaginative space with design components of intense immersion, cultivation of agency in novice researchers, faculty mentoring, and reflective practice offered a space for both faculty and student to endure and find comfort in the discomfort of liminality. We are grateful to both the faculty innovators in doctoral education and to the students that ignite and bring these innovations to fruition. We anticipate that by sharing our experience, other scholars will be inspired to consider unconventional approaches to data analysis. We also hope that others will share their experiences and continue to contribute to the growing body of work on pedagogical innovation written with students, rather than about them.
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