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## Teaching Sociology Students to Become Qualitative-Researchers Using an Internship Model of Learner-Support

This article examines the experiences of final year undergraduate sociology students enrolled in an internship course where they researched a local community project, mostly in small groups, for a client. A sociology lecturer supervised their projects. Course-related outcomes were assessed using conventional university procedures but a research process was used to evaluate the extent to which the cohort developed characteristics, or identities, of qualitative researchers. The research demonstrates that the students made many false starts but through processes of trial and error, and with effective support, they considered that they had increased their confidence and became capable of planning and carrying out research. For the students, this internship was not just another class. Their stories reflect on their abilities as researchers and adoption of attitudes towards appropriate research approaches, processes and outputs typical of professional qualitative researchers.

### Keywords:

Sociology, qualitative research, experiential learning, New Zealand

### 1 Introduction

This research article brings together a university lecturer (MT) in sociology with an educational researcher (KS) and an experienced research assistant (BS). Together they examine the impact of an internship class for sociology students in the Sociology Department at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Our key research question is: does participation in research-focused internship help students see themselves as qualitative-researchers? Specifically, do students undergo an affective change in their self-conception, or for them, is the internship just another typical class?

The lecturer devised the course in response to a concern that sociology students were being systematically disadvantaged in comparison with students in more vocational degrees such as education or social work. The latter subjects have a clear career path whereas sociology students are promised destinations (Author, 2012) but no clear pathway to get there. Additionally, parents would telephone the lecturer in his role as sociology programme coordinator at the University of Otago asking him how a BA in Sociology could translate into meaningful employment. Parents do not see the conversion from learning about society to being employed by society. They are not alone. Sociology undergraduates typically ask similar questions: what can you do with sociology beyond its emphasis on

an academic critique of sociological research and society? (Finkelstein, 2009). This uncertainty may be the nature of a Bachelor of Arts degree (Spalter-Roth, Scheuer, Senter, Stone & Wood, 2010). English, Geography and Anthropology BA graduates experience uncharted pathways to employment. This situation is not ideal in an economic environment where education is accompanied by significant cost, which often leaves students and their families in debt (Finkelstein, 2009).

Social work and education students do not ask where their degrees lead to, as their pathways are prescribed for them. These students, subject to demand, will be employed as social workers or teachers. Moreover, academic institutions place undergraduates in vocational settings, immersing them in the 'real' world, which allows them to quickly discover if this vocation is for them and if they are for it. Social work students at the University of Otago spend 60 days on placement in each of their third and fourth years of study (900 hours in total). Trainee teachers also spend multiple hours in situ. Sociology students do not typically spend time on placement, and are socialised by the vagaries of the "promise of sociology" (Mills, 2000) or "sociology as a humanistic perspective" (Berger, 1963) or more recently, "sociology as a martial art" (Bourdieu 2010). These promises and perspectives do not necessarily translate into an employment pathway (Finkelstein 2009, p. 93). Sociology does not provide evidence that a degree in sociology can leap the "gigantic chasm between what they had learned in class and what they actually experienced on the job" (Finkelstein 2009, p. 99). A similar case was made by Eitzen, Zinn and Gold (1999) with respect to sociology education in the USA.

An aspirational outcome of the internship was to support students' experiential learning to enable them to provide convincing and professional answers to the 'job interview question': *Tell me about the research design of a project you were involved in, its outcomes, and explain what your contribution was to the project.* Although there is no universally accepted description of the attributes of an undergraduate researcher, they ought to be able to answer this question, using appropriate research language, with conviction and self-awareness of both their abilities and limitations. A challenge for the

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research has been to find appropriate approaches to gather data pertinent to this outcome and to situate this analysis within the rich theoretical landscape of higher education learning and teaching. Our discussion uses several theoretical approaches for this purpose and emphasises the complexity of evaluating the attainment of professional identity.

## 2 University of Otago's sociology internship

Otago University's sociology internship is unique in New Zealand but may be more common internationally (Eitzen, Zinn & Gold, 1999). It serves as a bridge for students who are completing their degrees by providing them with specific experience to prepare them for entry-level policy analyst positions in government ministries or NGOs. In effect, it gives students who have previously passed two research methods courses (all but two in this particular course) the opportunity to road-test their book learning in the field. The six community organisations that had chosen to be involved in this internship in 2013 were all based within Dunedin City. They were:

1. *South Dunedin Pride*: This project involved a history of the people, places and events of South Dunedin. Based on a similar project that MT had seen in an Ottawa Museum, the students had to create a photo image and then a story about persons, places and events in South Dunedin. The primary client was the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce.

2. *GrowSouth*: This project, sponsored by a local Member of Parliament, documented an organisation's drive to create a community garden in a low-income area of the city. The organisation comprised a mix of Rotary people, local residents, the University of Otago and the MP. The organisation asked the students to produce a video to document this process.

3. *Access Ability*: Access Ability is an organisation that assists people in the community who have intellectual disabilities. One of its directors asked to research and develop a pamphlet to bring together resources for people with intellectual disabilities.

4. *Wriggle and Rhyme*: In the previous year (2012) internship students worked with the Dunedin City Library on its mobile library. The project in 2013 extended the relationship with the city's library, this time researching a parents and babies group called Wriggle and Rhyme that meets within the library. The Library identified the output as either a video of the group or a written project report.

5. The University of Otago's *Marine Science Outreach for Gifted and Talented School Children*: This project studied high school students who took part in the 2010 Gifted and Talented program. The director of the programme wanted to know how the high school students experienced the course and what impact it had on their subsequent learning and social networks. She

especially wanted to know what it was like being among students with similar abilities and returning to the regular classroom afterwards.

6. *Dunedin City Farmers' Market*: One student who joined the course in week three of a thirteen-week semester took this project. Unlike the other sites, MT did not initiate this project and the student worked relatively independently. The student met with the organiser of the Farmers' Market and together they determined the research question.

For their final output the Farmers' Market student, Wriggle and Rhyme, and Gifted and Talented groups all produced written reports for their clients. GrowSouth produced a video of the community garden and people involved, while the Access Ability group developed an information pamphlet for school-leavers who have intellectual disabilities currently - being distributed to appropriate organisations such as schools. Finally, the South Dunedin Pride group made a computer-based visual presentation of thirty events, places, and people, which they presented to their clients.

The six projects and the research described in this article were subject to University of Otago ethical approval, although one key task for each group was to rework the participant's information sheet (initially developed by MT as part of the ethical approval process) as part of assignment two. Each project involved the students meeting their particular community group to plan and discuss research objectives and questions, interviewing clients at intervals, analysing data and producing reports or resources for the community groups.

The formal part of the course included four assignments designed to add structure to the students' research programme. At an early stage, groups wrote a research protocol inclusive of a literature review, an outline of the research problem and the rationale for choosing the methodology. Soon after, they designed their research instrument (i.e. survey, interview guide) and rewrote the participant information-sheet. Approximately two thirds of the way through they wrote a preliminary report on how their data was collected and analysed. Towards the end of the semester they completed a final written report on the project. The course met weekly allowing students to update the class with their progress. For most students, this course was at the end of their final undergraduate year.

The course had seven learning objectives:

1. To work cooperatively and effectively within a small research team
2. To use methodological skills and theoretical insights to define an iterative research topic that should be negotiated with the client
3. To design a single or a mixed methods research instrument that meets the needs of the research question
4. To present the findings as a written report or another resource for the client

5. To gain experience working within a community agency and conducting oneself as a professional researcher
6. To conduct the research adhering to key ethical principles
7. To experience the highs and frustrations of conducting a research project

The key activities at the heart of this work were students' first experiences with practical qualitative community-based research. Many of the learning objectives were open to conventional and formal assessment within the course like writing a multi-staged research report. Some aspects of the course were anticipated to be more challenging in this context such as the students' ability to meet the client and comprehend the research problem or question they wanted studied and to translate that into a recognised research design. Learning objective five, 'conducting oneself as a professional researcher' for example, relates to professional identity rather than to more easily assessable personal attributes. The internship course was designed to enable a range of anticipated research and ethical complexities to be addressed. Students developed a personal safety plan to address possible dangers thought through in advance. (For example, the female student conducting intercept interviews in the Farmers' Market planned what to wear, who to tell she was on site and what to do if she felt unsafe). The seventh objective, 'to experience the highs and frustrations of conducting a research project' represents MT's aspiration for formative experiences for his students, rather than aspects to be assessed, but nonetheless with anticipated effects on the development of these new professional researchers. (For example, the Gifted and Talented group were in an almost constant state of frustration. It was not until their third recruitment drive in the second to last week of class that they generated their sample allowing resolution to the project).

The students' ability to describe a qualitative research project using research language, with conviction and self-awareness, is potentially a very good test for a new qualitative researcher, but a challenging outcome to formally describe and assess. Simon and Brown (2005 p. 9) describe "the difficulty of clearly conceptualizing some aspects of learning that are seen as highly desirable (e.g., attitudes, dispositions, values, identities), but do not have a common interpretation in the way that straightforward practical or cognitive skills do". Bloom, Hastings and Madaus (1971) and Knight and Page (2007) emphasise the difficulties of assessing these complex outcomes on an individual basis and they advise that evaluation can be achieved on a cohort, or programme, basis. This article describes a research-based evaluation of these hard-to-assess outcomes in the second cohort of this new course. Two other articles described broadly based research on the first cohort of this course (Author et al 2013; Author et al in press) that led to the current format of the course and the in depth evaluation described here.

### 3 Methods and Ethics

There were ethical challenges to be addressed in researching this internship. The authors attempted to produce and maintain a clear line between teaching the students who were taking the course and researching their development. The lecturer (MT) was both the supervisor and assessor for the students and took no part in the data collection, until after the students' final assessment. All 15 students enrolled in the course were invited to take part in this research project, with a guarantee that if they did not, it would make no difference to their course or grade. Taking part in the project involved being available for interviews at the end of the course. Ten students volunteered. Students had the option of being interviewed either by themselves or as a group. At least one member was interviewed from each of the six groups and for three of the groups all members were interviewed.

The research assistant also asked to interview MT after interviewing the students, as all of them reflected a great deal on the impact of what some described as his 'mentoring' role.

The educational researcher (KS) and the research assistant (BS) were the primary researchers and KS contributed to research design, data analysis and reporting. BS conducted interviews with participants at the conclusion of their projects. In addition, during the course she established rapport with the students by giving a guest lecture outlining her many high-risk research projects and later conducting a tutorial for the students.

Interviews with individuals, at the end of the course, were semi-structured and allowed students to contribute what they thought were important views on their experiences. But the interviewer also invited students to respond to three questions on pre-determined themes. One of these questions we called the "job interview question" as we asked the students to describe their research project, as if they had been asked to in a job interview. Another question was "what would you do differently next time?" This question elucidated how critically the students were able to reflect on their work and what they had learned. And finally, students were always asked the open ended questions, "what did you find difficult about the course?", "what helped you along the way?" how did they experience working in a group for the first time in their university career? All interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using both inductive and deductive approaches to draw out and to exemplify common themes of interest that arose from within the data.

### 4 Results

Results are presented here as themes of interest and each of the themes is described and illustrated using quotations under student pseudonyms. Overall, the themes are of student perceptions of transformation and include: overcoming fears, sources of advice, working in teams, learning about methods, situating the projects beyond the students and experiential learning. This



section ends with an analysis of responses to the job interview question.

#### 4.1 Overcoming Fears, one at a time

MT knew the demands that independent research would have on the students. In a post-course interview he said he deliberately designed the course so that students had to overcome real-world fears that occur in research jobs:

I wanted to challenge the students and create a number of challenges. I saw that the fears actually went step by step with the research project itself. So it was sort of an experiential type learning style that one has at Outward Bound – that you overcome one fear and then take that learning to the next one.

At all stages of the projects, as the student interviews demonstrate, MT guided and supported the students through each challenge so that they were able to overcome obstacles and develop increased confidence from the experience. Learning to 'break down' the project into manageable steps was beneficial, and Nellie said that MT deliberately designed the course outputs in a manageable way:

It helps just so much (knowing your topic and research question). Like I like the way the internals [assignments] were set up kind of like in your steps of your project because yeah it really does help, kind of like having goals to work towards. When you look at it as just having one big project it's like oh gosh, how am I going to get any of it done?

For nearly all the students, meeting the client and conducting the literature review were two of the first fears they had to confront. Many students found the literature review to be a difficult process that frequently did not initially yield useful results, yet some of them, like Toni in the GrowSouth project, found it to assist in framing their research from the beginning:

Starting off with the literature review, right from the start was pretty good, probably the most helpful thing, it gave us some pretty good ideas.

For most groups the literature review preceded their first meeting with the client, allowing the students to present the client with some background information. Unfortunately meeting the client was not always straightforward and was complicated by various factors such as the time constraints on the client or student. All students found this a 'nerve-racking' encounter. This was compounded by the fact that this was the students' first experience where they themselves had to conceive of their own research question. Even though most of them had carried out a literature review by the first client meeting, most students expected the client to frame the project even to the point of stipulating the output, be it a written report, a pamphlet or a video.

In hindsight this issue could be addressed better, to some extent. Next year the lecturer will provide more support for this stage of the project. However, this planning cannot foresee the possibility of the students having multiple clients, each with different aspirations. Mid-way through the South Dunedin Pride project, the local Member of Parliament took an interest in the project, suggesting it move beyond its historic focus to highlight South Dunedin's history with a tourism focus. MT intervened and suggested students from the next internship cohort conduct this focus in 2014. The Wriggle and Rhyme group, as detailed below, were beset with a number of novel research impediments. They also found they had multiple clients. The first client - the public library - was interested in whether the music group alleviates the parents' social isolation. As Sport Otago sponsored the music group, they too met with the students and expressed an interest in how the music group enhanced child development.

The Gifted and Talented had a different initial challenge. They met with their client's assistant as the client was overseas and this delayed the commencement of the project. Students' impediments to carrying out research were sometimes idiosyncratic. The Wriggle and Rhyme group had an adverse reaction to being identified by others as researchers. This excerpt demonstrates their anxieties around simply 'being in the space' and their legitimacy in being there:

Amber – It's just sort of really intimidating when there's all these sort of mothers there wondering what you're doing invading their space kind of thing and just worried that they aren't going to want to talk to us and help us out so....

Another theme of legitimacy in 'being in the space' required courage from the student working alone. Nellie undertook intercept interviewing at the Farmer's Market:

Approaching people is real scary at first, because you kind of look at people as big and scary and like 'it's my down time I'll do what I want' and like you realise that they're just like you and you think about it, if someone approached you you're not going to....so yeah it's not as scary anymore.

The survey researcher overcame her fear through 'imagining how she would feel' if she were them. Other students employed a variety of methods and resources to overcome their fears. They cited being in a group as helpful (for those in groups), having MT as a support and guide, and simply *having* to overcome the fear in order to complete their project. All students cited the fact that this project was not just being completed for their lecturer and a final grade - but was in fact for a community organization - as being one of the most motivating factors in conquering fear in order to *get the job done*. Nellie who did the intercept interviewing at the Farmer's Market describes this below:

I think like the main thing that caused me to get over those fears and anxieties, was like I actually had to, like I wouldn't be able to get my final output if I didn't get over it. So you kind of wake up and realise right, I'm just going to put myself in there and go for it...

By overcoming their fears and anxieties, students like Susan from the South Dunedin Pride project, developed confidence; this confidence was directly related to *just getting out there and doing it*:

I think this [course] gives you more confidence as a person, because like I'm quite a shy person. So it makes you grow, it makes you more confident I think because you have to like go into the meetings. It's just like getting out there and doing it.

As students' comments elucidate, their confidence grew 'as a whole' and affected them as 'a person' not just in their course work, and this creates transferable skills. Amber said:

I think it's changed us as people, like I'm a lot more confident in myself because it was a hard task to overcome, especially when you're not exactly outgoing before you do it.

#### 4.2 Sources of advice and feedback

When asked what helped them overcome difficulties, all students cited MT. Susan described him as 'more like a mentor' than lecturer:

Being able to contact [MT] whenever you wanted was really helpful. Like I emailed him all the time I swear and he always replied like straight away. And he gave us his home phone number like in case you were in an emergency. It wasn't like a lecturer situation it was more like a mentor situation, which I liked more. Than like a lecturer who just gives you things and says yeah just work it out yourself."

When interviewing MT after the student interviews, he described himself as a "coach" to the students and justified his decision to make himself available to his students 24/7 as self-preservation. He wanted to know about any ethical blunders that may have happened and to be available to help to address them.

Many students mentioned the fact that MT was 'always available on email' (he would reply almost immediately) as reassuring, as was the fact they could drop by his office any time. He also assisted many of them with their research interviewing skills, helping extend the four-minute phone interviews into rich twenty-minute dialogues. Hilda from the Gifted and Talented group describes the improvement:

I was so nervous for the first [interview], but we did it and we felt it went okay but then listening back on it, it was very short and like not very detailed like when we

transcribed it there wasn't really any information there and we reckon that's because we were hand feeding them the answers and like I was doing all the talking and I don't know that carried on happening for the next three interviews but then for the next one [MT] listened in and he told us like the big thing is to pause. So we did that, and they went from like four minutes to like twenty-minute interviews, it was so good.

The four-minute interviews were not data-rich but they were experience-rich. First they rewrote the interview guide, focusing more on open-ended questions and moving away from yes and no answers. The second learning was how to use silence.

In his self-described 'coaching' role a number of students described the lecturer as helping them 'not to stress' or as being a 'calming influence' in the face of a looming crisis when the group studying the Gifted and Talented students failed to recruit students. At first, as Richard describes, the project recruitment had received few participants:

I think [MT] was a pretty calming influence especially when we hadn't had much progress in our report and he kind of said just calm down and guided us on how to do it pretty much. We hadn't received much interest from the students, and we couldn't start writing our report until we had interviewed the students, but we ended up getting over that by just emailing the organisers and asking if we could just ring them, so that was good.

Fifty per cent of the course grade was allotted to the four assignments and the grade was given to the group. Additionally, students wrote a reflective journal that was graded individually. This allowed MT to monitor the internal workings of each of the projects, and if a student described anxiety then this could be addressed. It was through this that he learned about the Gifted and Talented fear of interviewing high school students. In response he sat in on one interview and taught them about silence. Ask a question, pause and listen, and the four-minute interviews became twenty-minute dialogues.

The reflective journals also proved to be useful for a number of students, as often aspects of their project did not become clear until they reflected upon it (the weekly updates were similarly useful for this process) Hilda said:

I think the reflective journals that we have done have been quite good, they've just given us a chance to think of what we've been doing and like the problems that we've had and stuff like that. It just made me thought about what to do better next time.

#### 4.3 Working in teams

To work cooperatively and effectively within a small research team was a key-learning objective, as many entry-level policy-analyst positions involve working in team environments. We felt that it would be important



to explore the extent to which students - particularly those new to teamwork at a tertiary level - are able to negotiate the various challenges that teamwork involves. For many of the students, it was the first time in their university career that they had worked in teams (particularly in the case of sociology-major students). While some groups had minor difficulties with team dynamics, most of them found being in a group to be reassuring and a positive learning experience. Hilda and Richard's Gifted and Talented group conducted all of their telephone interviews as a team:

Hilda – I think I would have been way too terrified to do the interviews if I had been working on my own, and yeah the others just brought in so much more knowledge than I could.

Richard – I think the work load would have been too much for a semester anyway.”

While time management is not a skill unique to research, it is a critical aspect of carrying out quality research for a client, and all students mentioned how their time management skills had improved due to the necessity of the project being completed within the thirteen-week semester. Moreover, when asked what advice they would give to future students, most stated time management and organisational skills as being critical. For Amber this was her first teamwork project:

Yeah we realised we didn't have much time so we set ourselves a deadline and got it done. Like we should have done that earlier as well. Setting ourselves deadlines helped, like we set ourselves a deadline not long ago and we were fantastic like we kept it in time.”

#### 4.4 What students learned about research methods

Students talked at length about how their views on research had changed, and what a positive impact applying their theoretical knowledge from other methods papers had on their understanding of research. Many students discussed their significant improvement in understanding research interviewing skills. Christine said:

People take for granted the question process, because we thought oh yeah, we'll draw up a couple of questions and what do we want to know, that's easy, but what we found out was you had to actually really think about what we wanted to know, what questions are going to assist with our final output....And sometimes it's really hard to not ask closed questions, because you forget that people can just say yes or no. So just learning to word it differently, that's all it took was just changing the wording of the questions, yes or no, agree or disagree, but you want to know why as well. And even if it's just following the question up with 'why do you think that?' Yeah.

Helen found learning to use silence could not be taught in the classroom or out of a textbook.

I guess the interviewing was the hardest thing, and getting the participants to participate, that was really hard. And kind of frustrating. But I guess for me personally, just learning that silence thing where you just sit there and don't say anything was really hard to do but I managed to get it sorted, so that was really good, it totally worked though.”

Coding and transcribing the interviews were other research skills frequently mentioned as being enhanced by the course. Helen said:

I guess a few things as simple as team work right through to the skills of coding and transcribing and interviewing and stuff like that and writing the final paper as well, because I'd never done that before.

The course exposed some basic gaps in the students' research skills. The Gifted and Talented group report revealed that they had never used academic search engines until this paper, despite having taken methods courses prior to this third year course:

Richard – I think my ability to look for relevant literature, that's also improved.

Hilda – Yeah and just like writing skills too.

Richard – Yeah because this was the first time I used Google Scholar, and the key words helped refine my search. So yeah that skill has improved too.

Unexpected complications in communication impeded the research. Group members were frustrated to find teammates did not have Wi-Fi in the flats or insufficient funds to preload their phones. The Grow South team had weather related complications. Much of the Grow South video footage was filmed outside and suffered from poor sound quality so was not used in the final film.

#### 4.5 This project is more than me

While completing projects on time is something students have to learn through all levels of education, the students mentioned that it was the fact that they were doing this project for community organisations that made it 'matter more' in terms of timeliness. Nellie outlined her commitment:

You know you're actually working towards something that's going to benefit a group of people, it's not just this abstract thing that you're doing and getting a grade on yeah. I think you put more thought into it because it does matter, it's not just you that you're letting down if you do a bad job you know, there's heaps of people relying on you, and you actually want to do well.

The students' projects were bigger than themselves. Given that students were out in the community and representing the University, they were very aware of the need to be professional, and became conscious of what this means. Beverley claimed:

Like ultimately I knew we were representing the Uni, so I knew we had to be like quite like a person someone could come and talk to, like professional and approachable, like we had to be like kind of reserved and just watch what we were doing, but I don't think any of us were prepared..."

The Wriggle and Rhyme group learned the value of professional detachment as emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) when they found some potential informants less than hospitable. Beverley and then Amber said:

Beverley - I guess you were quite self-conscious about how you came across, like you couldn't be too far to one side, just like neutral and kind of almost like put on a face but not take anything too to heart, like kind of.

Amber – Especially when you get the rude mothers, you can't take it too to heart, like it's not against you.

This perception further highlights how intimidating these students found getting in and getting along in the research site.

#### 4.6 On the virtues of experiential learning

This internship was described as 'real' by Nellie, and that made a significant impact on her learning:

Hands on experience is definitely better than just reading and writing and having something to relate it to helps, because it's not just something that you've read, or just something you've heard, like context, you've been there and applied it and I think like you realise like things you need to do in research that you hadn't even thought about before, just simple things like approaching people politely and you know being a bit more open with people and like thinking about the safety plan. Like I thought all of these things seem silly, but they are really necessary at the same time. And I think like if I was just doing a paper that was just reading a whole lot of information telling you how to do it, it wouldn't stick, and then when you went to actually do it, you'd be like 'God what do I need to do?' yeah.

Susan's South Dunedin Pride group experienced great learning:

Definitely a big learning experience for me, I think it was really good.

I'd never conducted an interview, I'd never coded before, I'd never done anything so like hands on, all I'd ever done is like readings texts oh this is how you do it, I'll just write that into my essay and just hand in my

essay and out the information goes. But while you're actually doing it I feel like you retain it more. It's like, I like applying things to real world situations, and that's something I definitely did in the paper which I really liked."

The students not only learned how to do a research project, they learned how to do the next project. All interviewees said they would make a point to meet with the client more frequently and plan more time for the end of the project creation of the report, the pamphlet or the video.

Students' positive views on their experiences during this course were reflected in their responses to an anonymous feedback survey taken at the end of the course, which all 18 in the class participated in. For example, 80% of the students felt that they had improved their ability to solve real problems in the field.

#### 4.7 On the job interview question

We end with one example of students (from the Wriggle and Rhyme group) answering the job interview question. This is a typical representation of how students answered this question; in detail, and with an awareness of why they did what they did, how they overcame obstacles, and what they would do differently next time. Beverley and Amber told this story finishing each other's sentences:

B-Initially we got put into groups and then we got given our project, but we were only given the context or title of our project, we weren't given any idea on what we were supposed to be researching, and then, so we had to go to Wriggle and Rhyme.

A – and meet our clients, and set up a meeting, and meet them and find out what they wanted from us and expected from us and what we thought we could do.

B – And from there we kind of formed a topic surrounding developmental stages for the babies, and then we also had another topic, which was...

B - Initially [the client] wanted us to study social isolation but we didn't feel that was strongly coming across, so we thought why force that if it's not really a key aspect. So our other little topic was key benefits for the mothers but then we kind of merged the two decided we'd focus on benefits for mothers *and* babies. And from there we had to familiarise ourselves with the topic.

A – Then we had to do the lit review, find out the research and come up with a question.

B – Yeah it was after the lit review that we decided to merge the topics, because the lit review didn't really relate to anything we would be doing.

A – Yeah we had to do a lot of changes throughout the process, the more we got into the group, the more we knew nothing was going to work, so we had to re-evaluate the situation. And then went from there and we had to decide on our methodology; like qualitative, quantitative, mixed. And we decided to do mixed.

B – Mixed is definitely most appropriate for us because like the mothers were really the source of information that we needed to use.

A – Because you can't really ask a baby questions.

B – So yeah we had to organise how we were going to go about doing that, and so that's when we got to know one of the mothers and then..

A – She told us it would be hard to do any individual interviews.

B – Yeah she said individual interviews would probably be a no go, so then we decided, well we talked to [MT], and decided that focus groups would be the best way to go with two groups of five.

A – And we had a meeting at the library to let them know where we were going, what was happening.

B – Yeah that we were going to hold those groups and stuff. And [MT] also told us about Survey Monkey so yeah we set up the surveys.

A – So that we didn't break any ethical guidelines, we asked the librarian to send out the surveys from her database, so that we didn't have to get everyone's email address and we could be ethical.

B – Yeah and then we conducted the focus groups, after telling the mothers that we were going to be holding these groups in the next following weeks..

A – Between the focus groups we transcribed

B – and coded the information.

A – So it was all fresh in our mind at the time.

B – And when you do go through the interview again, you do pick up, you just naturally themes and key ideas that you kind of forgot about in the interview.

A – And sort of doing the surveys, waiting for them, because we didn't send out the surveys until after we'd done the focus groups, so that got mothers coming to the focus groups, instead of just answering the surveys.

B – In hindsight we probably should have sent out surveys a bit earlier but we didn't really know that we were going to be doing that as well.

A – It was sort of last minute decision. Cos we did think of just handing out paper ones and getting them to fill them out there, but then most mothers up and leave straight after so that wouldn't work.

B – Yeah, they tied up just feeding and getting the babies organised.

A – And now we're just at that analysing stage, going through step by step.

B – And we're going to put the report together!

There were variations on this job interview answer but a theme that is remarkably absent in them is description of fear. In the case of the three Wriggle and Rhyme students, as we detail elsewhere, their initial fear was being in the room where the music group took place. Their first task was to observe the group for thirty minutes. The students found the task overwhelming. The fact that this part of their story is absent above highlights their ability to look back and focus on the tasks and their achievement, not the fear.

Variations on this job interview included justifying decisions around final outputs (e.g. video versus write-up), differing decisions and justifications regarding methodology (e.g. quantitative versus qualitative versus mixed methods, and focus groups, surveys or one on one interviews), and many groups emphasised the importance of defining their research question, the difficulty some had with this, and the process of the literature review.

In general the overall theme was coming to terms with the responsibility of doing an independent project for a client while being exposed to scary circumstances and expectations. Many favourably contrasted the internship with the prerequisite research methods courses by saying the practical nature of the course was more educational than theory-based classroom learning. Christine from the group studying resources for intellectual disabilities said:

It's just not the same as any other paper I have ever done because you're actually doing stuff, you're learning about all this stuff in the other papers but when you're applying it you're actually understanding why you're learning it and it's fine to say, write a bunch of questions about a study you're not actually going to do, but when you're actually doing it you see that you actually do have to change your questions throughout the process, you do actually have to change your topic at some point because it's got to be defined, re-defined, all that sort of thing and also how you're going to just lay out the final project as well. All those things you actually learn how to do in this which is really cool...it is an actual research project and it's just really good experience because with other papers you don't get interaction like you do with this paper, it's just like a real project. It's just like something that is offered to people at higher levels, or like an introduction to that, and also people that want to go on to do Honours and all that sort of thing. So it's just real research and really understanding what you're learning."

All of the groups went beyond the requirements of the paper for their final outputs. After they had completed their last assignment and exam, they all maintained contact with the community organisations they had been working with, to continue their work or put significant finishing touches on their projects. The reasons they gave for this extra work were varied, such as members of the Wriggle and Rhyme Group thinking that the relationships they had built were important:

Beverley – I feel like we've built up relationships you can't just chuck out, like you have to keep in contact with them, yeah, because otherwise it would just be rude.

Others simply wanted to do the best possible job for their client:



Hilda - I wanted it to be as perfect as possible for our client.

Regardless of their reasons, all groups went beyond the requirements of the project and continued their work and connection with the community organisations. This demonstrates the impact of the project on their sense of responsibility and professionalism that they developed.

## 5 Discussion

The results suggest that these students conceptualised that they had developed their self-confidence as researchers during these projects as well as considerable empathy with the approaches and values of professional qualitative research. In their minds they came to accept: the inevitability of limited research-planning in the messy and non-linear world of qualitative research; the great benefits and opportunities, and challenges, afforded by teamwork; the certainty of public speaking; and they took pride in their achievements as measured by the outputs from their research and their commitment to their clients.

It is possible to interpret the increase in confidence and the development of 'identities' as qualitative researchers, using more than one educational theory or framework. Indeed several may be necessary to fully engage with the complexity of the changes that may be happening here.

The experiential learning model assumes that 'students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college are developing habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and personal development (Kuh, Schneider, & Association of American Colleges and Universities 2008, p. 25). Community engagement, for Kuh, is high-impact learning and teaching and the students in this course confidently assert the significant, and positive, impact that the course has had on them and their ability to cope with similar challenges in the future.

Self-efficacy and social-cognitive theory (Bandura 1977) provides insights about how individuals' confidence and abilities grow together in social settings. Bandura asserts that experience of mastery, or achieving a significant and challenging outcome, is an important factor determining a person's self-efficacy. All of these students achieved significant outcomes and their confidence was palpable to their lecturer.

Social constructivism (Vygotsky 1978) suggests that learners advance by learning and problem solving at the edges of their understanding with the support of teachers and peers. Lave and Wenger's (1991) extension of these ideas into the model of 'communities of practice' provides an excellent framework within which to interpret the roles of individual students, their peers, their academic supervisor and their community contacts, and the impact of all of these things on student development. The internship course could in this context be interpreted as supporting the development of identity within a professional socialisation process.

The learning domains described by Krathwohl, Bloom and others (see for example Bloom et al., 1971) in the middle of the last century helps us to recognise that these students have learned, to a degree and in a cognitive sense, how to be qualitative researchers. They are clearly developing the knowledge and skills identified in the course's intended learning outcomes and formally assessed within its operation. But these students also self-identified and exhibited to the researchers a range of attributes that are not easily ascribed to cognitive learning. Some learned how to listen to others and many expressed, as a revelation, the need to, and benefits of, understanding the perspectives of others in their team. Many of the interviews expressed participants' increased motivation to undertake research and their excitement about undertaking a research project in a team setting and talking with team members. Most apparent is the sense of extended confidence in themselves, in their abilities to put research processes into operation and to appreciate the nature of qualitative research. The affective learning domain of Krathwohl, Bloom and Bertram (1973) puts these outcomes clearly within the lower four levels of learning in this domain (listening, responding, valuing, organising values). In the students' own words, it is clear that these students have progressed through the affective learning domain, perhaps to different degrees and perhaps without structured support with affect in mind, but progressed nonetheless.

As early as 1993, Davis claimed that internship projects have great potential to draw together theoretical work from disparate areas of sociology to serve as a bridge to postgraduate study and help students assume more active lives as citizens and consumers of knowledge (Davis 1993). Finklestein (2009 p. 90), however, argues that 'the field of applied sociology and teaching and learning sociological practice has struggled to develop in the discipline.' Michael Burawoy (2005), president of the International Sociological Association, has revived these questions by noting that there is a 'growing gap between the sociological ethos and the world we study' (Burawoy 2005 p. 7). Burawoy (2005) calls for a 'public sociology' to close the gap. Cook (2011) goes one step further by invoking 'public sociology' itself as a public good: "By taking the knowledge, skills, and techniques of good qualitative research, we can improve our communities and help generate a stronger foundation and enhance everyone's quality of life". We thank an anonymous reviewer who suggested we tease out the synergy between public sociology and internship. The anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out that "public sociology should be regarded as a sub-discipline of sociology while introductions to internships refer to the way sociology is taught." To that end, Bach and Weinzimmer (2011) argue that sociology students who participate in community-based research (i.e. internships) gain a greater proficiency in undertaking the entire research process, from creating and implementing research plans to making data-derived client recommendations; the core elements of this internship



course. New research on experiential learning/research-based learning and teaching has started to identify various benefits to students. This research does need to focus on issues such as students' personal and professional growth, how learning occurs, how students' intellectual or cognitive development runs alongside their affective development, and how communities of practice encourage students' cognitive, affective, epistemological, inter and intrapersonal development. These questions cannot readily be answered using conventional and individual assessment processes. It seems likely that internship models of teaching provide one way to encourage the complex learning that Knight and York identify as essential to employability (Knight & York, 2003). And that research-based evaluative-approaches, like that described in this article, hold the key to getting to grips with how university teaching relates to student learning. The authors suggest that that even relatively short community-engaged internship courses offer students the opportunity to grow in terms of confidence and to enhance their learning in both a professional and personal capacity.

## 6 Conclusions

The research demonstrates that these students considered that their abilities as qualitative researchers had improved as a result of their experiences and that they had adopted attitudes towards appropriate research approaches, processes and outputs typical of professional researchers. The authors suggest that more than one educational theory or framework is necessary to interpret the changes observed in these students, but that providing students with a community-based internship course prior to graduation with a sociology degree, addresses many of the discipline's concerns about sociology degrees in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The lecturer involved started this project in a disillusioned state, about the prospects and abilities of sociology graduates, but ended with a substantial sense of pride in what had been achieved by his students. His own unexpected transformation was how this project immersed him within his community and opened doors for his own research.

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