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Madhubani Art: A Journey of an Education Researcher Seeking Self-Development Answers through Art and Self-Study

Kavita Mittapalli and Anastasia P. Samaras
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

This study is situated within a self-study research methods course to scaffold doctoral students' explorations of the intersections of their culture, and research interests using arts as a tool. Embracing the arts as a research method, the first author painted a self-portrait using the vibrant colors of Madhubani art which holds cultural significance to her. She utilized Blumer's (1986) and Mead's (1934) theory of symbolic interactionism to explain the process of her self-development as a researcher. Combining her self-portrait with an earlier research study proved valuable as a conduit for understanding and interpreting her work as a research methodologist. This study is valuable to others interested in studying their practice and research identity through an arts-based research method. Key Words: Self-study, Arts-based Self-study, Madhubani Art, and Learning Qualitative Research

Introduction and Background

This work grew out of a newly designed doctoral level course taught by Anastasia that offered students an opportunity to both learn about and apply the self-study research methodology; a qualitative approach for systematically examining one's role and interest in an area of research with applications for improving one's situated professional practice. The course, self-study qualitative research methodology, included a comprehensive synthesis of the self-study literature: purposes, foundations, nature, and guidelines for application. Students learned about and applied self-study methodological requirements integrated with assignments that were individual and collective, personal and interpersonal, and private and public (Samaras & Freese, 2006). The methodology requires specific dispositions, i.e., openness, reflection, collaboration, validation with critical friends, transparent data analysis and process, and improvement-aimed work which contributes to professional knowledge. Class assignments are designed to stimulate deep reflection on the concept of the "self" within a professional/practitioner context.

Self-study is "a component of reflection where faculty and students are asked to critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously-driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse" (Samaras, 2002). Self-study scholars inquire thoughtfully and deliberatively into their often taken-for-granted practice and the assumptions embedded in their practice. This reflective assessment pushes the researcher to a closer examination of one's research practice, an understanding of the impact of personal

experience, and a reframed professional stance (Loughran, 2007). Researchers may recognize a disparity in what they believe and what they actually do in practice (Whitehead, 1989). Although there is a large body of research related to the self-study of teacher educators and teachers, particularly through arts-based research (e.g., Hamilton, Pinnegar, Russell, Loughran, & LaBoskey, 1998; Loughran & Russell, 1997, 2002; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Russell & Korthagen, 1995; Samaras & Reed, 2000), there are limited examples of its usefulness to practitioners outside of the teaching profession. Anastasia invited students to explore the applicability of the methodology to their work as professionals and specifically to develop self-study research exemplars (Samaras et al., 2007).

Arts-based Self-Study Method

As self-study researchers we offer an example of utilizing one self-study method taught in this course, i.e., an arts-based self-study method as a research tool. The arts-based self-study method promotes and provokes self-reflection, critical analysis, and dialogue about improving one's research through the arts (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Arts-based self-study researchers use a wide range of art forms to represent and reinterpret, construct and deconstruct meaning, and communicate their study of researching as they make it public. It can take many forms including visual/image based arts, e.g., portraits, performance, photography, video documentary, art installations, multi-media representations, films, drawings, cartoons, graffiti, signs, cyber graphics, and diagrams.

Holzman (1997) notes that the arts are a conduit for dialectical unity for our capacity to relate to ourselves and others. She explains that learning and development are inseparably intertwined and emergent, that is, who we are and simultaneously who we are becoming. Arts-based education research, as Barone (1995) and Barone and Eisner, (1997) argue, leads to empathy and a deeper understanding of research that is not possible with traditional representations. Research in its traditional form aims to create an understanding of the research situation through the processes of experimentation, observation, and control of that situation. Arts-based educational research creates an understanding of a general situation through a descriptive analysis of that specific situation or a process while, at the same time, encouraging an audience or a reader to question his or her biases and examine his own experiences concerning that situation (Eisner, 1995). Dewey (1934/1980) states that art can appear to be initiated through an "emotional discharge" (p. 61) or "inspiration" (p. 66), however he has no doubt that an artist must be able to analyze his or her own personal history and experience in order for there to be sufficient material on which to base a work of art.

In this research course, each student was asked to design and present a self-portrait as a developing self-study scholar using an art medium of their choice, e.g., sketch paper, pencils, poster paper, markers, clay, crepe paper, felt, colored pencils, oil paint, watercolor sets, crayons, cardboard, wood, etc. Students were assured that the activity did not require any artistic training in portrait making and they would not be evaluated in that manner. After students completed their portraits, they were prompted to reflect, write about, and share their self-portrait with the class. Anastasia gave them numerous prompts to stimulate their reflection, for example, any learning or research experiences and/or

dilemmas depicted in the portraits; the historical, social and cultural context of their self-portrait; portrayal and perceptions of identity and gender as a researcher; relationships to others who might be in the painting, meaning of the portrait background; a possible title for the portrait; and any markers of one's research journey. Samaras and Freese (2006) stated,

> Self-portraits are a form of text useful for reading, broadening, and communicating an understanding of one's self-study research practice and learning. Self-portraits generate data useful for researchers' professional knowing. Dialogue with peers about portraits is a means to construct and reconstruct one's thinking about who you are as a developing self-study scholar. (p. 167)

Anastasia offered an alternative soil for thought to seed with prompts of nourishment, constant questioning, pushing for clarity, and assisting to formalize it into a study. As a professor and a mentor, Anastasia helped to shape the students' ideas about self-study and its application in their field of study or practice and helped to define the focus of their self-portraits. This article presents an arts-based self-study research project of the self-portrait work of the first author (hereafter I). Anastasia's contribution to this piece is multi-fold; as a co-author, an expert in self-study methodology and as an instructor and mentor to me throughout the learning process.

My Research Path to the Self-Study Course

As a doctoral student specializing in research methodology, I was required to take seven courses altogether in qualitative and quantitative research methods. I had already taken five research methods courses being offered in my department between fall 2004 and spring 2006 and had two courses remaining in order to complete my majors. I was aware of the course requirements for the mixed methods course that was being offered the following fall but wasn't sure about the new course in self-study methodology being offered that spring. I contacted Anastasia asking her about this self-study course option and this discussion convinced me that I would learn about a new research methodology called self-study. The self-study course had variety in its structure and collaborative activities. It was in this course that all the students were required to make a self-portrait. I chose to make my self-portrait as a researcher in three stages for my inquiry project into self-development as an education researcher

My Arts-based Self-Study Project

The study aimed to examine my self-development process as a researcher from the perspective of examining and understanding how I learned to conduct qualitative research using arts. The arts contributed to the construction of my self-development as a researcher. I painted a self-portrait and shared it with peers in the self-study class. I learned about Madhubani art many years ago in India as an undergraduate student from a friend majoring in fine arts but I did not foresee its power in opening a pathway to my research process. The art form is deeply rooted in my history, culture, and experiences.

How I became an Education Researcher

My academic story begins in year 2000, six months after coming to the United States to start a new life away from my home in India. I had earned a degree while in India in Agricultural Sciences with several courses in agricultural statistics and farm engineering. It was in my senior year when I was exposed to qualitative research when as part of my minor (Rural Extension), I went to a village in north India to learn about the various agricultural methods the farmers were using to grow rice. As a team member, I interviewed the women of the village to learn more about their problems and issues obtaining the rice grains, the village bureaucracy and influences of the weather on their crop production. For me, the whole process of trying to learn from the farmers first-hand and not just compiling data in our classrooms/lab was a big revelation. It was as if I were taken to the next higher level of conducting research. With the hope to continue my learning more about this new method, I came to the United States as a student to pursue graduate studies in applied sociology. The various qualitative methods courses provided the fuel to my yearning to delve into this newfound world of research. Upon graduation, I joined a research and evaluation organization to evaluate an education program. After three years of working there, I decided that I needed to learn more about research methods and applied to graduate school to specialize in research methodology. It was in graduate school that I learned about methodologies such as self-study.

Theoretical Framework

The lens used to frame my investigation about self-study is through symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism, or interactionism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. Blumer and Mead emphasized the subjective meaning of human behavior, the social process, and pragmatism. Interactionists focus on the subjective aspects of social life, rather than on objective, macro-structural aspects of social systems. One reason for this focus is that interactionists base their theoretical perspective on their image of humans, rather than on their image of society (as the functionalists do). For interactionists, humans are pragmatic actors who continually must adjust their behavior to the actions of other actors. We can adjust to these actions only because we are able to interpret them, i.e., to denote them symbolically and treat the actions and those who perform them as symbolic objects. The process is further aided by our ability to think about and to react to our own actions and even our selves as symbolic objects. Thus, the interactionist theorist sees humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world, not as passive, conforming objects of socialization (Mead). My ways of knowing are based on an interactionist view of the world that sees humans as active, creative participants who construct their social worlds.

Research Questions

My self-study included the following research questions: (a) How do I learn to do qualitative research; (b) What are the stages of my evolution as an education researcher;

and (c) How does employing an art form help me better understand my specialization as a research methodologist?

Methods

Data Collection

The method utilized was arts-based self-study with the medium of Madhubani art. I made a self-portrait using that art form to support my task of applying self-study to better understand my practice. Data for my arts-based study were collected during a semester long course. The primary data sources included: (a) personal interviews with three doctoral students conducted in another course that served as a precursor to the current study and as an inspiration to make the self-portrait; (b) my self-study portrait using Madhubani art form; and (c) a narrative on the process of making and reflecting on the self-portrait. As part of the self-study research course, peer-feedback, constant correspondence with Anastasia and fellow students served to validate the process of self-study. I discuss each of these primary data sources next.

Interviews with Doctoral Students

As a graduate research assistant to another professor in a previous semester, I worked on a project, "How do students learn qualitative research"? I conducted personal interviews with three advanced level graduate students to understand how they learned to do qualitative research, while comparing it with my own process of learning qualitative research. Among the students were one male and two female students who I shall call Harvey, Diane, and Lena respectively. They were working on their dissertations at the time of the interviews. All of them had acquired qualitative research experience through one of the two graduate-level courses. Like me, they all had come from a quantitative professional background. Harvey was an engineer with an interest in visual learning. Diane was an accountant interested in adult literacy and Lena was a teacher educator interested in brain research in teaching. Diane's interview was conducted at the university library on campus, while Harvey's and Lena's were conducted over the phone since they were located in different states.

For data coding, I used the connecting and categorizing method (Maxwell & Miller, 2001). Maxwell and Miller have contributed to the theory of qualitative data analysis by drawing primarily from linguistics, studying two types of relationships: those based on similarity and those based on contiguity (Jakobson, 1987; Lyons, 1968; Saussure, 1986). Maxwell and Miller comment,

> Similarity-based relations involve resemblances or common features; in qualitative data analysis, similarities and differences are generally used to define categories and to group and compare data by category. The strategies that focus on relationships of similarity are categorizing strategies and coding is the most prevalent categorizing strategy in qualitative research. Contiguity-based relations, on the other hand, are

> connections that are identified among data in an actual context (such as an interview transcript or observational fieldnotes). These include relations in time or space, links of one-directional or reciprocal influence, or relations among parts of a narrative. They refer to strategies that focus on relationships of contiguity as connecting strategies. (p. 1)

Categorizing strategies take the data in their segmented form; they label them with discrete codes or in terms of particular themes. These data are then grouped by category, examined and compared, both within and between categories. The most prevalent categorizing strategy in qualitative data analysis is coding (Maxwell & Miller, 2001). Connecting analytic strategies, analyzing and reducing data; this is generally done by identifying key relationships that bind the data together into a narrative or a sequence.

I used the categorizing method to form codes in each of the interview transcripts based on the similarity of emerging codes and compared them across the data set. I used the connecting method to identify relationships of data within each interview transcript to form a sequence. In order to form categories across the interviews, a separate profile for each individual participant was developed and then grouped according to the categories formed. Charts 1-3 present concept maps for all the interviewees.

The technique of concept maps was developed by J. D. Novak and his researchers at Cornell University in the 1970s. It is a technique for visualizing the relationships among different concepts/ideas/thoughts. The various concepts/ideas/thoughts are connected with labeled arrows, in a downward-branching hierarchical structure. The relationship between concepts is articulated in linking phrases, e.g., "gives rise to," "results in," or "leads to" (Novak, 1995). Concept maps can be used to generate ideas, and are believed to aid creativity. For example, concept maps are sometimes used for brain-storming. Although they are often personalized, they can be used to communicate complex ideas (Novak, 1998). Table 1 presents the category profile across the three transcripts with common themes across them (highlighted). It should be noted that the tables and concept maps are only a way to exhibit the data across the three interviews and depict the narratives themselves, rather than analyses of the data.

Table 1

Categorizing the Codes Across the Interviews

Categories	**Harvey**	**Diane**	**Lena**
Area of interest	Process of visual learning	Adult education	Brain research in teaching
Differences between basic and advanced qualitative courses	Basic-I learned the process of qualitative research, got the idea how it works. Advanced- It was 'more focused', 'technical.' I learned the various paradigms, used	Basic- It helped to get to know the 'process', through (reading) articles. Advanced- I came to 'know the mechanics' of qualitative research, 'interviewing techniques', 'categorizing and coding	Advanced- I learned the various coding approaches-used the approach of developing themes-codes-mind maps for my research. Used prose/poetry in qualitative research. I developed mind maps for each of my teacher interview.

	concept maps and narratives in my research, found the interactive design approach useful for my research. Qualitative research is an open process.	processes'.	
What did I learn in qualitative research?	- Participants' perspectives. - Findings should be grounded in a contextual framework. - Learned that qualitative research can explain causation through paradigms. - Qualitative research enables you to design your research as you go- it's an open process. - Be aware of validity issues. - Used memos in my research. - Used software to code data. - Used a combination of concept maps and narratives. Concept maps helped to look beyond the details, enabled me to understand things better.	-Understand my participants' perspectives. - Be aware of my role as a researcher. - Using software to code data. - Thinking about codes while collecting rather than having them (she refers to this because she learned that it was important not to start coding during the interview but to think about the various codes) - Passion for what I do- adult literacy issues. . - Knowing the culture of my participants. - Be aware of researcher bias (reactivity). - Interviewing techniques (making note of pauses in conversation)	- Understand my participants' perspectives. - Researcher relationship is important for my research with teachers. - Used reflection memos and journals for my teachers as well as myself. - Used prose in data analysis. - Mind maps for each teacher's transcript. - Research is nested in a context. - Peer feedback is useful for validity. - I, the researcher 'color' the research (reactivity). - Reflection is vital (for teachers and me). - Learning by 'doing'

Chart 1 (Harvey) - an engineer by profession, interested in visual learning

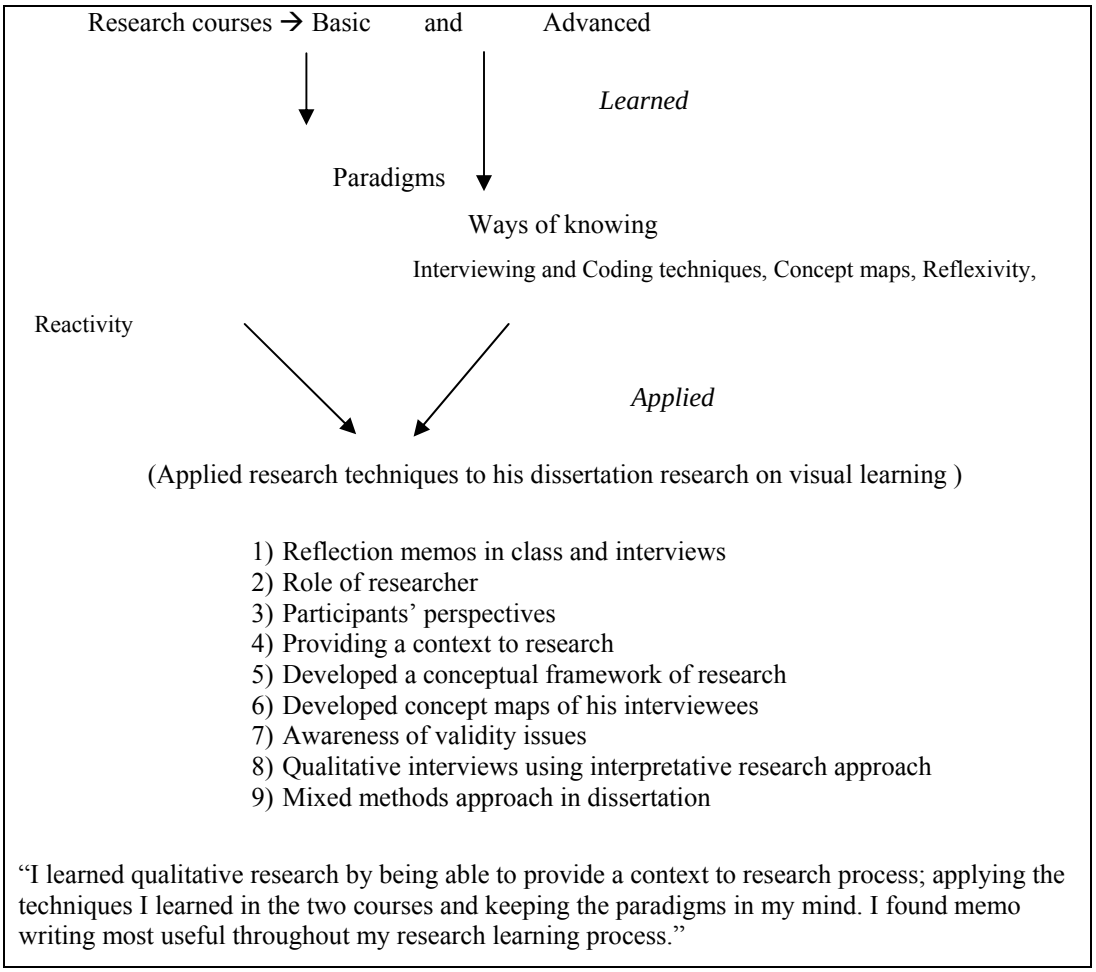
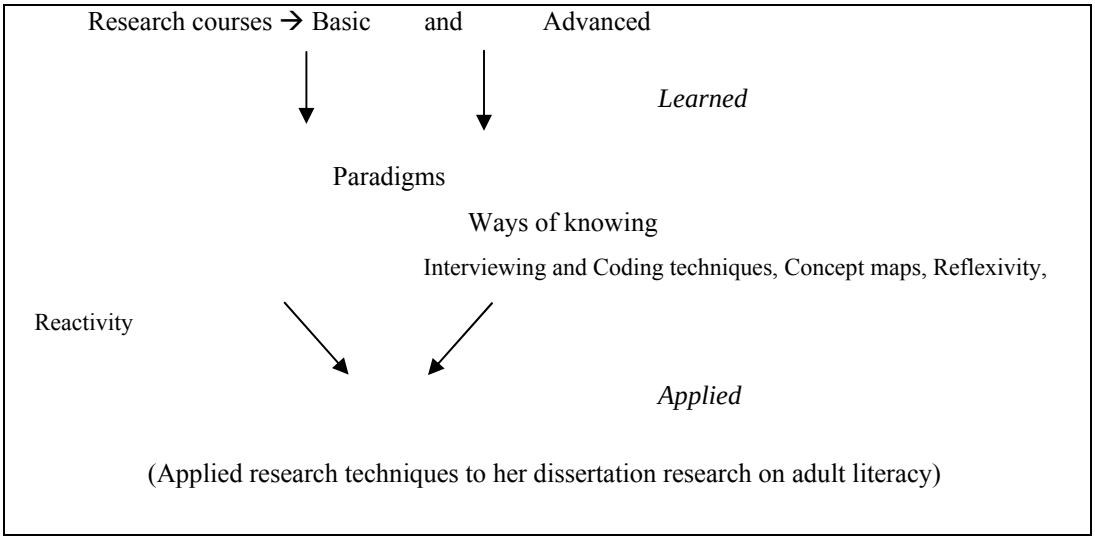


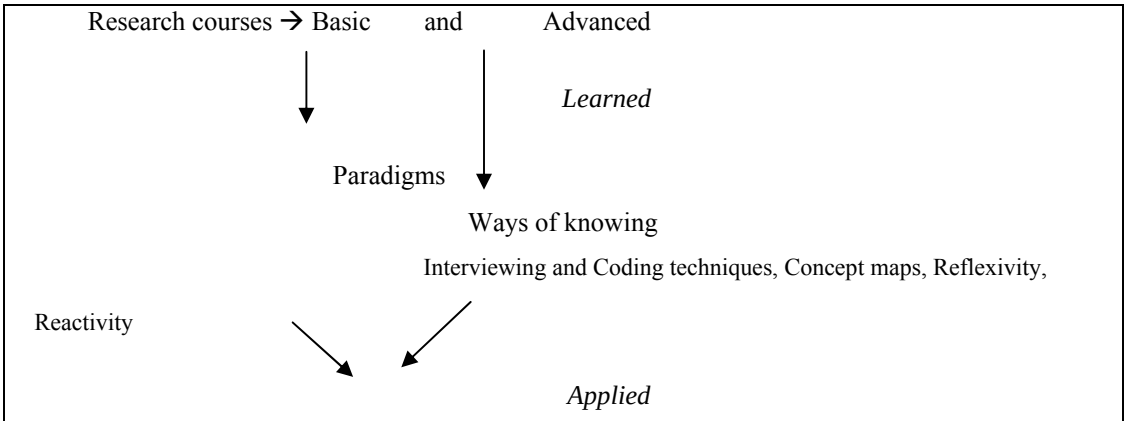
Chart 2 (Diane) - an accountant by profession, interested in adult literacy



1) Participants' perspectives and culture
2) Reflection memos in class
3) Coding the interviews
4) Role of researcher and biasness
5) Developed a conceptual framework of research
6) Qualitative dissertation

"Passion for learning the research process first hand in the field drove me to it. I was a participant in my research and I was fully aware of my 'coloring' the process. Reflective memos were very helpful in providing me the context and giving me a perspective to my study."

Chart 3 Lena, a teacher educator interested in brain research in teaching



(Applied research techniques to her dissertation research on brain science and teaching)

1) Used reflection memos
2) Peer feedback
3) Developed a conceptual framework of research
4) Developed concept maps of her interviewees (mind mapping)
5) Researcher relationship with participants
6) Learning by doing
7) Context to research
8) Used narrative in her dissertation in the form of poetry
9) Mixed methods approach in dissertation

"I learned qualitative research by actually "doing" it after learning the various techniques in the two courses. Learning to understand my participants' perspectives was vital to my learning process. "

The research with the doctoral students served as a background and an inspiration to work on a self-portrait for the self-study course the following semester. The portrait triggered in me the following questions: How have I learned to do qualitative research? What in qualitative research makes me appreciate it so much? How do I perceive myself both as a qualitative as well as a quantitative researcher after all these years of working

and being a graduate student? What have I learned from these students who have also come from a quantitative background? Thus, the interviews made me formulate my thinking about my own journey as a researcher: how I developed as a researcher from a quantitative academic background of an agriculture undergraduate major to an educational researcher and evaluator who uses both the methods. The interviewees' thought processes of being flexible, reflecting from work, learning by doing, and being aware of my participants' backgrounds, resonated with my own perception about learning to do qualitative research. It was these components of qualitative research that framed the elements of my self-portrait. I saw myself only as a quantitative researcher earlier in my undergraduate studies, where I was trained in statistics, and used crop data to predict the future productivity of a crop at a given time. It was as if I was collecting and analyzing data mechanically, there was no "human" interaction, or trying to understand where my participants' perceptions were coming from. My exposure to qualitative research methods opened a new window to my thought process; of understanding my participants' views and perceptions while thinking about my own. Being a researcher, I was also inviting bias into research. Being aware of that while working with my participants was a revelation. I was not taught about it any of my statistics courses in my undergraduate classes. Therefore, my self-portrait clearly depicts my growth and development as a researcher. The assignment provided me a way to use my earlier research work as a background and draw a self-portrait.

The interviews were an important episode to unfold in my own research learning trajectory. Many thoughts of my academic life and of the experiences which shaped it were brought to the foreground from tracing the itineraries of these students in the graduate program (Huberman, 1993). As a result, I view the self-portrait as a powerful resource for reflecting on my own academic and professional past, present, and future.

My Self-Study Project and the Madhubani Art Form

Madhubani art has its origins in the Madhubani district in the eastern state of Bihar in India. It began as a traditional family form of art where it is handed over from one generation to another for centuries. The world at large came to know of Madhubani and the women as "artists" only in the last four decades. The painting is mainly depicted on walls, paper, cloth, religious and decorative ceramic pots, and sometimes on wood. Later on the artists started painting on fabrics like sarees, table cloths, and the other bases when Madhubani art was made more commercial due to national and international efforts. The raw materials used for this painting are papers, satin cloth, fabric cloth, cotton, cloth etc. For painting on paper, natural colors and natural dyes are used, which are locally abstracted. Fabric colors are used for painting on the walls. Although, I wasn't able to locate any academic research on Madhubani art or its influence in education or any other fields, I was able to find notes about the art and several paintings on the Internet (e.g., http://www.beacy.wa.edu.au/art/tribal/madhubani.html).

For the self-portrait, I used oil paints on a canvas. I haven't received any formal training in painting or in making Madhubani art, but had been exposed to this art form in my undergraduate studies in India and by a friend who was an art student.

Narrative on the Process of Making and Reflecting on the Self-Portrait

Reading through my class memos for the self-study course and my previous research, I thought deliberatively about why I chose to use this art form for my self-portrait and its purpose. This art form provided me the required means to not only represent my self-development process in an artistic form, but also gave me a way to express my inner self as an Asian Indian woman examining her ways of knowing as she grows as an education researcher. I have always thought of Madhubani form of art as a simple, "straight-from-the-heart" way of expression. This was also one of the main reasons which motivated me to use this form of art.

I chose to make this painting for a multitude of reasons:

- The type of painting is called "Madhubani" art- a folk art form from Madhubani district in the eastern state of Bihar where the women use bright natural colors from vegetable dyes to paint their homes, walls, and fabrics to express themselves. The form of art has come a long way from rural India to the commercial streets of the country where people buy the paintings to decorate their homes.
- The simple figures, almost geometric in form with bright earth colors have always attracted my attention. I have been awestruck with such simple strokes that can form such powerful media of feelings and expression.
- I started painting this form of art when I was in my undergraduate studies at an agricultural university in India. I think it was only natural for me to paint agricultural fields with men and women working hard to produce rice, wheat and other crops.
- I have used this particular art form for my self study because it resonates with my "work" as a researcher toiling away with my head bent down looking for answers to my questions about research, my role as a researcher, and my development as a researcher below the wide open sky.
- The portrait also shows the stages I see myself in as a researcher — the quantitative me, the qualitative me, and now I think a step in between the two. But, I still find myself closely examining the various methods of inquiry!
- Just as a farm worker's work is never done, it goes on in cycles — just as one crop is cut, it's time to sow the seeds for the next season; I find myself circling around in my own questions and answers, going forth with the answers I could find but back again with new questions.
- The bright, vibrant colors give me hope and help me to look at the brighter side of research and life in general and inspire me to go on looking for answers to my questions with my head bent down!

Interviews' Impact on My Self-Study Self-Portrait

A close examination of data from the three interviews revealed the various techniques the three participants learned in the two qualitative research methods courses they had previously taken, which helped them to make connections to their research work, provided a context to base their findings, understand their participants' perspectives, conduct research that was valid and reliable, understand their role as a

researcher, issues of reactivity in research, being flexible with the research and interview questions, peer feedback and constant reflection upon their work.

Harvey said, "I have learned the various paradigms and have used concept maps and narratives in my research. I have found the interactive design approach useful for my research" (see Maxwell, 2004) and "Qualitative research is an open process." Diane noted "You need to have a deep passion for what you want to do in qualitative research. If you don't, maybe it's not for you". Lena commented "You as the researcher and the instrument 'color' the research and the background you are in, you have to take that into account when you conduct qualitative research and try to be unbiased" and "Peer-feedback or member checking is vital for the validity of qualitative research. Diane added, "I have learned to do qualitative research by 'doing' it. I have learned so much in the process."

Overall, the roles of affect and knowledge in doing qualitative research came to the fore through this previous work. All the students who previously held a positivist view of research framed a constructivist stance while doing their research work. They also said that their dissertations had a qualitative component to them as they realized that in order to know the context and the deeper meaning of their participants' views, it was important to conduct and include qualitative research. As Lena said in her interview, "Before taking the qualitative research course, I was sure to have only a quantitative component to my dissertation. I had my research questions and methods all laid out. After taking the course, I felt I had not taken my participants' perspectives into being. It was as if I was missing a big picture!" Harvey said, "My dissertation certainly has interviews now. My memo taking during the research project was very useful in my reflection process throughout. I have used the interactive approach to a conceptual framework as explained by Joe Maxwell in my dissertation. The course was an eye-opener." Diane added that her study that was based on adult literacy would not have been possible if she hadn't thought out the life process of the women she was interviewing. Where they were coming from was the most important part of her research design.

This previous research provided a foundation to my self-portrait when I took the self-study course. These interviews were a conduit to investigate my own learning to do qualitative research. Self-study researchers work to ask themselves the very questions they ask of others. In that manner, they are a resource for the research —to gain an insider's perspective on the research questions Although I had studied others' development and thinking as they shifted from quantitative to qualitative researchers, I had not thought deeply about my own journey. When the opportunity arose in the self-study research methodology class to create a self-portrait, I seized the opportunity to use arts to capture my self-development journey as a researcher seeking answers. In essence, the three data sources came together in a way I had not foreseen. The interviews prompted me to ask and wonder about my journeys in both quantitative and qualitative research. The self-portrait provided the canvas to capture my evolution as an education researcher and my current specialization as a research methodologist.

More specifically, the self-portrait led me to represent myself in three stages of my self-development as a researcher. My first stage as an Agriculture Science student trained in positivist view of the world; the second stage being exposed to the naturalist mode of inquiry; and my current stage being that of a self-examining researcher who wants to take a middle ground of using both the methods in my research with an equal

leverage. This study has provided a platform for me to continue to question my ways of knowing from the quantitative academic background to being exposed to qualitative and mixed methods approach, and examine my growth as an individual who is evolving as a researcher. The study also helps to apply my learnings and knowledge to my work as a program evaluator at a research organization where I use both qualitative as well as quantitative methods to collect and analyze data, understand the program participants' perceptions and views and self-reflect on my own thinking process throughout the process. The self-portrait reflects my journey and a tangible representation of my previously held notions about research which were positivist, to my exposure to the naturalist mode of inquiry; to my current status of looking at a mixed view of conducting research as I proceed towards my doctoral dissertation in three frames.

Figure 1. **Self-portrait Wonderings/Questions for a Self-Study Scholar**

The self-portrait was made with conscious ideas in my mind about the three stages I have gone through in the process while conducting the previous research followed by the self-study course. The three stages of "me" in the picture (Figure 1) shows me working towards my goal of becoming an education researcher. From left, stage one shows the quantitative side of me, stage two, far right, shows the qualitative side of me and the middle stage as the mixed research methodologist trying to blend both. The quantitative and qualitative sides of me appear to be raised in the portrait because they depict the "two continuums" of the paradigm debate. The center section, which is lower than the two, is providing a "middle" ground to the two contrasting views. The bright blue strip around the portrait provides a border to my thinking process as I try to examine my learning's. The green twine depicts the growth of my thinking and how it's still growing to enable me to become a better researcher. The bright yellow color depicts my "positive" thinking to my self-development that I look forward to as I finish my studies. The birds are

symbolic to the flight they are about to take as they learn at each stage of the research process.

1. How do I see myself as a self-study scholar?

As a self-study researcher, both as a student as well as a professional, I see myself questioning the process of conducting research as a whole. What is considered good and useful research and how do I see myself contributing to it? I constantly ask, "What can I bring to the field of research?" "What skills can I bring to the fore which are valued and deemed useful for informing the field of research and evaluation-the paths I have chosen for myself?"

I am in the stage of constant questioning, examining, and re-examining my thought processes as an individual who has developed as a researcher over a period of six years, while the seeds were sown long before that while on a field work project in a village in India. For instance, I find myself reflecting more on my work in graduate school and workplace. Being more self-reflecting has certainly enabled me to advance in my level of knowledge, assess more carefully about my academic and work performances, made me aware of my place and contribution in my institution, and future goals as a graduate student, researcher and evaluator. Self-study methodology has provided me with the necessary ways to express myself in a way that I could be "true to myself." (Cole & Knowles, 1996). I do realize that I have a long way to go. In these six years, first as a master's student and now as a doctoral candidate, I have taken the research opportunities that have come my way. I have tried to use my qualitative and quantitative skills such as coding, interviewing in qualitative research and learning and using different statistical software programs such as Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) wherever I could in the areas of health communication to begin with, followed by public and international affairs, survey research, community-based research and evaluation and now in education.

As a self-study researcher, I see myself wearing the researcher hat to carefully look at details, listening to others' views, understanding their perspectives, constantly reflecting, reading, and applying my skills to the assigned tasks. It is not an easy task to conduct self-study because I would come with my own biases about myself or maybe even excuse myself from any errors that I would do in conducting research. But with the help of my mentors at work and in school, it helps me stay on course and be critical of myself when needed.

The self-portrait exhibits my wonderings/questions as a self-study scholar in that as an education researcher, I sometimes wear the positivist hat conducting quantitative research, or a narrative/interpretive hat as a qualitative researcher, or as a mixed methodologist as I work as a program evaluator in the field. In all the three stages in whichever hat/s I am wearing, I try to apply my learnings from school to the field while constantly examining and finally reflecting on my self-development.

2. What role did peers play in the reframing process?

My peers were like my constant companions in good and in bad times. I needed them to pat me on my back when I was on the right path and also slap me on the hand if I

was way off! I needed peer/s at work and in school to tell me what I was doing right, what is good about my thought process, and what needed a change and why. Peers also added to the validity of my research, as they looked at my work with a "fresh pairs of eyes."

Anastasia and my four other classmates, who were also doctoral students, were amazed when I unveiled my self-portrait and propped the five foot canvas against a table in our class. Peers were intrigued and asked questions related to the art and the color choices as I offered my interpretation of the self-portrait as a medium of research understanding. There was no required format for the self-portrait assignment so each of us chose our own medium that came out of our experiences. One of my classmates sketched her self-portrait; others used oil painting, pastels, and symbolism. Each of us talked about both the process and meaning of our self-portrait to who we currently are as researchers. Anastasia commented in class, "Kavita's explanation of her self-portrait to the class allowed us to understand the complexity of a researcher coming from a training in two paradigms, i.e., quantitative and qualitative. It also demonstrated how she came to an understanding of the beauty and usefulness of that duality through the arts."

Discussion and Conclusions

The self-portrait led me to represent myself in three stages of my self-development as a researcher. My first stage as an agriculture science student trained in positivist view of the world; the second stage being exposed to the naturalist mode of inquiry; and my current stage being that of a self-examining researcher who wants to take a middle ground of using both the methods in my research with an equal leverage. This study has provided a platform for me to continue to question, and examine my thought processes as an individual who is evolving as a researcher from a more positivist to a mixed method researcher. The self-portrait reflects my journey and an objective and factual representation of my previously held notions about research which were positivist, to my exposure to the naturalist mode of inquiry; to my current status of looking at a mixed view of conducting research as I proceed towards my doctoral dissertation in three frames.

This project was a personal journey of self-development as a researcher to think, examine, and devise ways to develop further as a researcher through the lenses of fellow students. Using a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, the project attempted to understand how graduate students who previously held a positivist view of the research world came to use the various tools and techniques of qualitative research in their studies. The self-portrait is a reflection of the self as a researcher within different paradigms of thought. This study can serve to inform students and early researchers who are learning the process of conducting qualitative research; specially those who have a quantitative background and for professors interested in designing curricula that utilize an art-based educational research approach to assist students in understanding how they make meaning of qualitative research.

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Author Note

Kavita Mittapalli completed her PhD recently from the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. Her major areas of interest are research methodology, program evaluation and assessment, and social stratification. She holds a B.S. degree in Agricultural Sciences from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, and an M.A. in Applied Sociology from George Mason University, Fairfax VA. She has written, published, and presented at several regional and national conferences. She works at a private research and evaluation company. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Kavita Mittapalli at Kmittapalli@gmail.com

Anastasia P. Samaras is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University where she has served as director and coordinator of several teacher education programs as well as previously at The Catholic University of America. A former early childhood, middle school, and high school teacher, her 35 years of teaching and research experiences have continuously been informed through the arts. Anastasia has been active in the Self-Study School and most recently in her work with doctoral students. In addition to numerous articles and chapters, she is author of *Self-Study for Teacher Educators* (2002), co-editor of *Making a Difference in Teacher*

Education through Self-Study (2006), and co-author of *Self-Study of Teaching Practices* (2006).

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