

“Every Word Is True”: Stories of Our Experiences in a Qualitative Research Course

Janet C. Richards
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA

There is a sparse body of literature about students' and instructors' experiences in graduate qualitative courses. In this study, 11 doctoral students and one instructor employed a narrative framework to uncover our perceived truths about our experiences as we interacted, studied, pondered, and journeyed through a qualitative research methods course. Data were my chronologically ordered notes documenting my thinking and perceptions about my students and me and the doctoral students' chronologically ordered e-mail stories to their peers and to me. The inquiry illuminated the doctoral students' growth as researchers and highlighted the power of shared stories. Our narratives captured our lives, and illuminated our joys, worries, intentions, and beliefs. Key Words: Introductory Qualitative Research Methods Course, Narrative Inquiry, and Shared Stories as Truth

Experience happens narratively ... Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19)

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time---Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry has only recently gained credibility as an alternative methodology and a valuable research approach (Angus, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Adhering to Riessman's (1993, 2008) understanding of narrative as stories that are topic specific, temporally ordered speech segments as opposed to broad general text, in this study I employed a narrative framework to uncover the perceived truths of eleven doctoral students and me, Dr. R, their professor, in an introductory qualitative research methods course.

My Reasons for Conducting the Study

I have taught qualitative methods for five semesters. Few of the students I teach in the course have prior knowledge about qualitative inquiry. Some come from disciplines characterized by a positivist orientation and during student introductions they invariably announce they are required to take the course. Early in the semester, others sometimes mention their concerns about their lack of academic writing skills, or their apprehensions about sharing a required end-of-semester PowerPoint presentation that frames a potential qualitative inquiry they might conduct for their dissertation. One or

two students usually e-mail me, or talk with me privately about their difficulties critiquing assigned qualitative research articles. In some classes, a student may prefer to remain silent. On the other hand, every so often, some students may offer covert resistance by continually questioning weekly assignments. Yet, most appear motivated and enthused about acquiring a beginning foundation in qualitative research. They wholeheartedly participate in class discussions and collaborative group work. And, by the end of each semester students have bonded as a community of colleagues and researchers, and their evaluations of the course are always high.

Recently it struck me that although my students shared some of their thoughts and feelings with me each semester, I had little insights into their individual and collective impressions of their experiences as they progressed week-by-week through the course. At most, I held vague assumptions about their subjective realities. In fact, I believed some students' affirmative course evaluations might connect to their delight about successfully completing Qualitative #1. I speculated students in positivist disciplines learned to enjoy the class and perhaps even found some information useful to their work. I thought students who felt inadequately prepared at the beginning of the semester probably overcame their fears and might even have discovered they were meant to be qualitative researchers. In the same way, I had a hunch students' confrontational behaviors were connected to their apprehensions about doing qualitative inquiry. I recognized I wanted to know more about these doctoral students from disciplines in nursing, second language acquisition, educational leadership, literacy, science, English, mathematics, technology, early childhood, and special education. I wondered how they perceived the course, described it, felt about it, judged it, remembered it, made sense of it, and talked about it with each other (Patton, 2002). I also wanted my students to become aware of their own learning and thought processes as they took part in an authentic inquiry. In addition, I sought to document my students' experiences over time in order to discover how I might improve my practices as the instructor of Qualitative Research Methods #1. Moreover, since there are few published studies on graduate students in qualitative methods courses, I hoped to provide insights for other instructors of research methods so that they might consider their students' lives in and beyond the classroom. Furthermore, since "the term 'narrative' carries many meanings" (Riessman, 2008, p. 3), I wanted to write this piece to provide a record of my thinking and also illuminate my students' stories as they progressed through the course so that researchers interested in adapting narrative inquiry might develop insights into this perspective and methodology.

Therefore, at the beginning of the semester, I decided to invite student volunteers to engage in a study about their involvement and experiences in the class (notice at this time I did not say "engage in a study with me", although I soon changed my mind). I informed my students that inclusion in the project would have no bearing on their final grade. I explained that study participants would e-mail me weekly about their journey through Qualitative #1 and I would use their e-mail communication as data for a research project. Students would also exchange weekly email messages with a partner in the class and I encouraged them to send me copies of those messages if they wished. "E-mail allows individuals to send and receive messages quickly and at their convenience. E-mail is a medium that allows participants in a community to discuss common experiences, share ideas, offer advice, seek suggestions, confer about problems, and talk about

resources (Richards, Bennett, & Shea, 2007, p. 642; also see Pratt & Dolbin-MacNab, 2003). Eleven out of 20 students in the class volunteered for the project. Each participant chose a pseudonym they used in their messages to me that they sent through a special link set up by my college's technology department. Since the study participants used pseudonyms I had no difficulty receiving approval for from the Institutional Review Board at my university. After my initial discussion with students about the inquiry I did not mention the research project again in class. I strive to have good relationships with all of my students and I did not want those not participating in the research to feel left out, slighted, or marginalized. As one student who did not participate in the research commented a few weeks after our last class, "The inquiry was an invisible layer to us. We never thought about the study."

Situating the Research: My Philosophical Orientation to Teaching and Learning and Course Content

Who we are as educators shapes the tenor of our classes and impacts how and what students learn. Therefore, in this section I describe my philosophical orientation to teaching and learning in *Qualitative Research Methods #1*. I also present a succinct overview of course content.

I (Dr. R) am a white female professor in a school of education at a top-tier university. I value adult learners' experiences and talents, and work to align the instructor-student power dynamics so that we are all co-learners in the course. I believe learning is a social act and active participation is an integral component to students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding (Wenger, 2006). Accordingly, I limit lectures and promote an andragogical environment to create opportunities for students to become personally involved with their scholarship (Pietersen, 2002). I encourage students to solve problems, ask questions, discuss, explain, debate and brainstorm during class. I work to establish a climate in which inquiry is important and is considered a life-long habit. I also structure collaborative experiences where students work in teams on problems and projects under conditions that assure both positive interdependence and individual accountability.

In order to assuage my students' anxieties about studying qualitative methods and because I believe all students learn best in an active, enjoyable learning context, I purposely cultivate conditions and situations to help students feel comfortable. For example, I begin the first class session with a PowerPoint presentation that portrays a light-hearted, although authentic overview of qualitative methods. At every class meeting I also tell some real-life humorous stories related to qualitative research. I ensure students have various levels of support that include weekly electronic journaling with a partner on topics of choice, participation in small collaborative groups, and opportunities to meet with me as often as needed to review class notes and assignments.

I also invite former class members to speak to the class to offer words of wisdom and explain their personal dissertation voyage. Moreover, during the second half of the semester, when my students develop competence in qualitative research methods, I provide simulation experiences that enable them to connect class content (particularly theory) with the practical task of designing a qualitative inquiry. Specifically, I distribute a different scenario (articles I often find in the newspaper) to each collaborative group. I

ask students to take 30 minutes to read and discuss the situation described in the narrative and then plan a qualitative study based upon the information. They devise a title for the project, develop a rationale for conducting the inquiry, formulate research questions they want to pursue, consider appropriate theoretical perspectives and methodology, and delineate the limitations pertinent to the study. Groups present their work to class members who then offer their own ideas about how they might go about conducting an inquiry based upon the same scenario. I am a social constructivist through and through and after reading what I just wrote I recognize I want my students to take responsibility for their learning. I consider myself a learning helper – a facilitator.

Wondering about the Framework for the Study

Following Institutional Review Board approval and recruitment of the 11 study participants I began to consider an appropriate framework to undergird the methodology for the research. In my head I already had vaguely defined my rationale for the study and even considered possible research questions. I thought a straightforward phenomenological inquiry would be appropriate. However, after a few days of pondering I concluded it was not I who must tell my students' stories. My students needed to tell their own stories. Furthermore, if I only involved my students in the inquiry, half of the teaching/learning piece would be missing. "Ignoring the researcher's stories is both impossible and unsatisfying" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 88). Thus, I concluded I had to add myself to the study. I had to take into account how my own behavior, thoughts, perceptions, affective dimensions, knowledge or lack of knowledge about qualitative research, and philosophical position toward teaching and learning might contribute to, or detract from my students' experiences. I had to incorporate my own voice and insights into the research. Therefore, although I had never previously employed narrative methods, I decided I might need to use a narrative approach as the foundation for the inquiry. Narrative provides a framework to capture human experiences in all its complexities and richness (Webster & Mertova). In addition, narrative appeared to offer an opportunity for me to illuminate our lives as they unfolded temporally and to reveal the routine, every day particulars as well as the uniqueness of our experiences (see conversations with Polkinhorne and Mishner in Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Thus, a narrative inquiry approach had the potential to provide a chance for my students to reveal their thoughts, feelings, and intentions as they progressed through the semester. Narrative could also permit me as a researcher to be an active presence in the text as a storyteller and a story analyst. However, at this moment, as I write this section of the manuscript, I am a bit reluctant to use a research method I have never considered before. Yet, I have a hunch I will turn to narrative inquiry for this work because narrative inquiry will help me understand how my students make meaning of their lives and they proceed through *Qualitative Research Methods #1*.

Data for the Inquiry

Data for the inquiry were the notes I kept throughout the course, and the doctoral students' e-mail stories to their peers and to me. I did not require the volunteer study participants to respond to specific topics. Rather, I encouraged them to write what they

felt, perceived, and thought – to share what they wanted me to know about their lives in and beyond Qualitative Research Methods #1. As in all narrative work, my students, the storytellers, owned their stories. Therefore, I could not presume to constrain their thinking by providing a priori writing topics. My weekly notes documented my reactions to my students' messages and my thinking and feelings about the class and I often wrote e-mail messages in response to my students' notes to me. I found that occasionally my students' comments helped me adjust and fine-tune my pedagogy. For example, each week I edited my students' assignments thoroughly to help them improve their academic writing abilities. However, I learned from a student's e-mail message that I had neglected to comment on the content of his work. Thus, from then on, I made sure to remark on the planning and organization of my students' writing.

As I completed sections of the manuscript, I e-mailed my work to the 11 doctoral students for their input regarding the accuracy and verisimilitude of my work. In addition, I recognized how serious my responsibilities were to the study participants, readers of the manuscript, and the field of qualitative research in general. Therefore, I wanted to do my best to represent our truths. I also wanted to make certain as I conducted my first narrative inquiry that I was "doing" narrative correctly. Consequently, I e-mailed drafts of the document to two colleagues who are committed to qualitative methods and familiar with narrative and asked them to react to the text. Their thoughts helped assuage my anxieties about conducting narrative inquiry appropriately and I have included their messages in this manuscript.

Determining Data to Include in the Study

One quandary of narrative inquiry is the large amount of data that become available. Therefore, I must make clear my decision-making processes as I determined the data to incorporate in the study. Without question I was influenced by my own biases as the professor of the course and my previous personal and professional experiences. However I was careful to chose narratives and notes in the inquiry that I believed best illuminated the "truth" of our situated lives. I chose stories that reflected my students' strong emotional involvement - their feelings, worries, thoughts, and achievements. I also included stories that offered new information, or reaffirmed students' previously shared views, and perceptions. In addition, I chose stories that highlighted critical events, or revealed students' ways of thinking, or opinions that surprised me because I had previously been unaware of those viewpoints. In addition, because narrative inquiry is concerned with unfolding stories of human experiences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) I looked for stories that illuminated and reflected our temporally connected lives as they developed and changed over the course of the semester. As Clandinin and Connelly note (2000) "people live stories and, in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (p. 26).

Our Temporally Ordered Stories

As I wrestled with how to systematically arrange my students' stories and my notes, I found that Salmon's notions quoted (in Riessman, 2008) made the most sense to me. She says, "Whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events

and ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected” (p. 5; also see Salmon, 2008). Salmon’s statement helped me recognize that my students’ stories and my notes reflected our evolving experiences in and beyond the boundaries of *Qualitative Research Methods #1*. In order to present evolving stories, I needed to order the stories and my notes as a chronology.

Analyzing Our Stories

Because of the structure of narratives (i.e., stories), some scholars believe narrative research should not be judged using the same criteria as other forms of qualitative inquiry but instead should honor people’s accounts as data capable of standing alone as pure description of experience (Bochner, 2001). Furthermore, since narrative emanates from diverse disciplines there is no one unifying method of analyzing or interpreting stories (Riessman, 1993). However, the majority of narrative researchers believe “narratives do not speak for themselves” (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 264). People tell stories, but narratives come from the analysis of stories” (Frank, 2000). As Frank notes, “the researcher’s role is to interpret the stories in order to analyze the underlying narrative that the storytellers may not be able to give voice to themselves” (p. 4). So, as I write this section, to explain the fundamental template that guided my analysis of my students’ stories I am conflicted. I am certain my students’ stories are their truths and therefore, need little explanation or interpretation. In fact, I feel as though I might trespass with muddy feet into their hearts and souls – their personal worlds - if I attempt to characterize and categorize their candid, often poignant thoughts. Yet, at the same time, I want and need to illuminate how our stories about our experiences in *Qualitative Research Methods #1* make sense, change, evolve over time, and present a cohesive picture of our lives in *Qualitative Research Methods #1*.

Choosing an Approach to Analyze the Stories

After considerable reading (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cochran, 1985; Mishler, 1986; van Manen, 1990) I discover that Riessman (2008) was correct. There is no fixed set of procedures appropriate for analyzing stories (Horowitz, 2001). I decided to rely on a modified version of a narrative analytic approach offered by Horowitz that considers: (a) the central theme of a story (i.e., what is this story about? What is this person trying to convey?); (b) subject positioning (i.e., (How does this person see herself? What dimensions of her identity does she reveal?); and, (c) evidence of secondary themes (i.e., not central to a participant’s perspective but still important enough for the participant to mention). I chose this analytic method because I analyzed some of my students’ stories using these three areas (central theme, subject positioning, and evidence of secondary themes) and found this approach did help me discover the focal and secondary points of my students’ stories. However, at this time, I still did not want to play too strong a role in analyzing the stories. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, narrative researchers must not place boundaries on personal experiences. So, right now I am still wondering---- Our stories speak for themselves. Or, do they? What will I discover as I analyze the stories?

Our Stories

The beginning: First class, from my notes. (*Central theme, I like to teach happy people; subject positioning, “I am in charge”; secondary theme: worry that people might think I am sexist*):

As I (Dr. R) walked toward the classroom door I heard laughter. “Good,” I said to two women students sitting on a bench outside of the classroom door. “People seem happy and lively. I like to teach happy people.” I walked into the room and the two women followed me. I smiled at the students in the room and smiling faces smiled back, and then I saw some male students and a small distasteful memory of three former confrontational male students flashed through my brain. Although I was certainly up to the challenge these former students presented, I thought to myself, “Hopefully there aren’t any confrontational males in this class – not only were those three guys annoying- they took up a lot of class time.” As I write the word male, I wonder what readers will think. The confronters were male-that is true, but readers might assume I am sexist, or because I am a female, I as making too much of male students’ confrontational behavior.

Lacey’s story to me, (Dr. R.). (*Central theme, anxiety about the unknown aspects of the class; subject positioning, identity as a female engineer; secondary themes, seeking comfort from peers*):

As I sat outside of room 254 waiting for my first qualitative research class to start, the knots in my stomach turn into a full boil as nervous thoughts flood my head. I had never been nervous about a class before, but I was extremely nervous about this one. Qualitative research is a new topic for me. My engineering background did not expose me to this type of research and my lack of comfort for anything that falls into the gray area did not help. So what was really making me nervous? I had to admit it was the professor, Dr. R. Her syllabus was 75 pages long. That was more than a little intimidating. The workload didn't bother me. So what was bothering me? As I read the syllabus I went back and forth from reassured to scared. It was very reassuring to note the on the syllabus Dr. R was upfront about her willingness and desire to help and support us as we traveled this journey together.

Even though I had rationally gone through each of my fears I still was nervous. I felt a little better when I saw some familiar doctoral students. I asked if they had taken a class from Dr. R before. They all said no. I asked if anyone knew anything about her. Again no. Finally I asked if others were as nervous about this class and the professor as I was. They all answered, yes. Funny, but that did make me feel better knowing that I

was not alone being on the other side of the comfort curve and at least would have others to share my insecurities with.

About then a woman came up to the classroom, looked in the classroom window and then came over towards us. Was this Dr. R? I looked her up and down hoping to get a sense of who she was. There was something comforting in her smile and her eyes, but I knew that I would not be truly comfortable until I was certain of her expectations and could assure myself that I could not only meet them, but also exceed them. I sighed as I stood up and gathered my things to enter the classroom. The good news, I told myself: knowing is always better than not knowing and I was about to find out. I feel safe enough to share this now - this is what you would have gotten from me the first night after class Dr. R-- it's what I wrote in my journal.

From my notes. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the study. The IRB expedited the paperwork and classified the project exempt from further review because this is considered minimal risk research and students volunteered to participate in the inquiry. In addition, student volunteers chose pseudonyms to use in their e-mail messages to me and they are free to write what they choose, or they can decide not to write any messages to me.

As I write the introduction of this paper, I am aware I am preoccupied with composing the manuscript because I am intrigued with the possibility of telling our story using a writing style and inquiry method I have not employed in the past. Actually, rather than just writing, I need to also concentrate on what my students and I are thinking, feeling, and perceiving. In addition, although I have now collected two weeks of e-mail messages from the eleven doctoral students who volunteered to participate in the project, I have not begun to seriously analyze any data. I do know though, most of my students' messages are superficial. How do I get them to reveal themselves to themselves and to me in relationship to the course? Finally after two class meetings, one student, Lacey, a math major writes the following e-mail message to me. It inspires me to immediately send her what I've written so far on this manuscript. In turn, Lacey sends me her first journal entry that I placed at the beginning of this piece.

Lacey's story to me. (*Central theme, Lacey is lost and confused about qualitative research terminology; subject positioning, a math major; secondary theme, needs help*):

Dr. R, I'm lost. I'm a math major. My head is spinning trying to sort out ethnography, autoethnography, biography, autobiography, phenomenology and heuristics. It all started when I was reading the syllabus for this week's assignments. It said to read a life history or autoethnography. When I looked in the textbook under life history it said, "See Biography." Further research tied biography to ethnography because they are both about others and autoethnography with autobiography because they are both about ourselves. What is the distinction between life history,

ethnography and biography? In the same vein, phenomenology appears to be about others and heuristics is about us, but what differentiates phenomenology from ethnography? I'm going in circles. HELLLP.

From my notes. In response to Lacey's e-mail message I place a piece on ethnography on the class Black Board site for all of the students in the class to read. Then, I get to work on this inquiry again (I can't stop writing this piece). Maybe when I send out this draft in response to my students' next e-mail messages to me they will trust me more, reveal their honest perceptions to me, and reflect on their experiences instead of writing, "This class was fun."

I just read a quote from van Manen (1990) on page 104 in the Patton (2002) text:

A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. For example, if one tries to reflect on one's anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on experiences is always recollective on experience that is already passed or lived through. (pp. 9-10)

But, I disagree with van Manen. Dare I disagree with van Manen? Daudelin (1996) states, "Reflection is the process of stepping back from an experience (note that Daudelin doesn't say after an experience. He says stepping back from an experience) to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self" (p. 39). Similarly, Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) note, "continuous reflection involves reflection before, during and after the experience. Schon (1987) "introduces a vertical dimension to this dialog. Going up the 'ladder' of reflection involves moving from an action to a reflection on that action. Moving down involves moving from a reflection to an action based on that reflection. Diagonal moves occur when one party acts on the basis of another's reflection or when one party's action triggers the other's action" (p. 114). I think that's what we're doing here with this inquiry. I can tell by my notes that I am still conflicted about whether I should use phenomenology or narrative inquiry as a foundation for this study.

Right now I am beginning to worry about the length of this manuscript. One of the tensions of qualitative researchers is to illuminate the data and still stick to page count requirements. I need to get to my philosophical orientation about teaching and learning. I need to delineate the theoretical perspectives that undergird this study. I have to list the research questions that will guide the research, or do I? AND, I have to get to the data that illuminate my students' and my perceptions as we progress through the semester. As I move along in this initiative I also have to position the field text (all of the data regarding the research) with the research text (a chronicled, summarized account of what is contained in the field text; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I have a lot to learn as I journey through this study. AND I have to strike a delicate balance between self and this research. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) point out there is much to be gained from intertwining the self into an inquiry. However, they also caution against tipping the research too deep into the self and offering a confessional. Kauffman (1993) also warns against enchantment with self and I worry that I appear a bit solipsistic right now. "Charges of solipsism are commonly attributed to narrative work" (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 150; also see Patai, 2008). However, Pinar (1988) argues, “understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others” (p. 150).

Research Questions

From my notes. “Can’t help myself” – those lyrics in a current popular sexually suggestive song seem apropos right now because--Well, I can’t help myself. Here they are. I think I’ve got the nine research questions that will guide this study. I never wrote a qualitative research piece that had so many a priori questions. I’m wondering if these questions predict a complex or not well-grounded inquiry. No, this study will be grounded. Should I combine some questions? I can always alter or delete some of these questions later:

1. What are the study participants’ perceived experiences in the course?
2. What are my perceived experiences in the course?
3. In what ways do the study participants’ e-mail messages to me influence my thinking?
4. In what ways do the study participants’ e-mail messages to me and to each other influence how I structure course content?
5. In what ways do my e-mail messages influence the study participants?
6. In what ways do the study participants’ e-mail messages to me change over the course of the semester?
7. In what ways do my e-mail messages to the study participants change over the course of the semester?
8. What discomfort and frustrations do the study participants and I experience over the course of the semester?
9. How much personal information do the study participants and I reveal as we participate in the study?

From my notes. Here’s a thought: I just read that Webster and Mertova (2007) believe researchers who employ narrative inquiry need to be brave enough to let critical events arise from the data and resist the traditional research design of formulating questions a priori. I’m not brave enough yet to delete my a priori questions. – “Can’t help myself”- Perhaps later.

Suddenly, I get anxious. Suppose this entire project is a failure? Although I’ve published a lot of qualitative research manuscripts, I’ve never written like this before so I decide to e-mail what I’ve written so far to Suzanne (a pseudonym, a colleague who just left my university to take a teaching position in England). I want her input. She is a scholar. Here’s what she immediately wrote back.

Suzanne’s response.

Whoa - as my son would say - that's “raw!” “Raw” meaning excellent...but also, it is very authentic - uncooked - fresh! You've pulled lots of voices together well. I take a great deal away from it. It speaks to me as an

instructor. You have a gift in writing inquiry, and this really taps into where we need to be going in terms of really listening to students who are emerging scholars - emerging as ethical, reflective, and caring people who engage in scholarship; and creating a space for us to listen to ourselves...(I don't think we do that enough). I am struck by your intro...I get tense/nervous/concerned right before I teach as well, but it all seems to go away once I am up there in front of everyone, talking about what I know about - and thinking about how to guide others...I have talked to quite a few performing artists who share similar sentiments - I have heard several people say that they feel "at home on stage"- like the whole world disappears when they are working their art and craft. Teaching is like that for me. But yes, I have clouds and thoughts about the students - these are just flashes - you've captured yours nicely in the piece (e.g., your apprehensions about seeming sexist, and dare you disagree with van Manen).

It seems clear to me that your success in teaching is related to the amount of comfort and confidence you enable your students to have, given the complexity of qualitative inquiry. Thinking back to my first experiences learning about, and then engaging in qualitative methods, I remember being worried that I wasn't "doing it right" or that I would be judged on some standard of "truth" (having first been trained in quantitative methods...quite extensively) ... When I began to read more theory and philosophy I began to understand the provisionality of this "truth" and your piece shows this at work in your own, and the students' accounts of their actions and responses.

I recently re-read and took heaps of notes on a piece Grumet (1992) wrote in Pinar and Reynolds' *Understanding Curriculum and Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text...* Her piece is called *Phenomenological Foundations of Autobiographical Methods...* I could send you the proper cite if you are interested...She writes that educational experiences have an "effect upon [the] subject that transcends the immediate encounter ... in other words, is generative ... [a] hybrid of objectivity and subjectivity [that] transcends its inheritance" (p. 29). --And she conceptualizes "education as a metaphor for a person's dialogue with the world of his or her experience" (p. 29) ... education/learning then, requires an awareness of this experience...

These educational or learning experiences that you are writing about, and your students are writing about are indeed products of a hybridity of how you both come to know (and articulate - via writing) yourselves as knowers-of-the-world.... Great stuff! Thanks for sharing! Suzanne.

From my notes. Then, I send this part of the manuscript to Lola, a second language acquisition student in the class who seems like a kindred qualitative spirit. It is clear I seek affirmation about this unusual (at least to me) research. She writes:

Lola's response.

WOW –Talk about metacognition on an emotional level! I am going to have to start writing -- inquiring and writing -- a LOT more. I'm not sure who that student, Lacey, is... I will find out next class! What's funny is after slugging through Stats I and II last year, I approached this course with near zero trepidation. I couldn't wait to get started, to dig into teaching, learning & human interaction --- PEOPLE, not numbers.

From my notes. So, rich data pops up already. Some students entered the class with considerable anxiety. Others relished the idea of completing Statistics I & II and moving on to qualitative research. I hadn't thought of that. And, there is a thread that runs through my own voice/self: happy students, collaboration, connections. I am loving this. But, stop: I am making some generalizations and assumptions too soon – Do not typify yet. Do not assume. Be conscious of the process of epoche. Epoche is a process in which “researchers engage to remove, or at least become aware of assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation” (Katz, 1987, p. 37). I know it is time to definitively provide the theoretical perspectives undergirding the inquiry. However, I cannot resist sending this document to Mary Lou (a pseudonym) my colleague, who has a strong background in qualitative research. I am still seeking affirmation of narrative. She writes back:

Mary Lou's response.

Hi —you have already captured so many dynamics of the social context of a doctoral class—it did make my head spin! I carried out a study using heuristic inquiry and found the following source to be most helpful:

Frick, W. (1990). The symbolic growth experience: A chronicle of heuristic inquiry. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 30(1), 64-81.

Heuristic inquiry is exhausting work—you are brave to invite students to engage in this with you. I like the way you continually addressed the value of your teaching—noting reasons why students may have said the course was good. (Isn't this ongoing analysis??) This connects back to your questions. You mention that you think you have not begun to analyze—I think that one challenge of heuristic inquiry—you are really analyzing as you go along, and it is a constant worry that “maybe I am leaving something out.” I love your challenge of van Manen—and I agree with you. When you reflect retrospectively, the incident has changed—looking back is not the same as looking “wide” while immersed. Perhaps the problem is the word “reflect”—we always think of that as after the

fact. We need a new word—I know Schon (1987) talks about “reflection in action” and “reflection on action” but I have not been able to find that citation—I will keep trying—To me, what you are trying to represent is what happens when we are being observed: We continually view our actions as if we were the ones observing. It is exhausting—but I think that is one thing you are doing. Maya Angelou wrote in *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* about making her ears really big so she could capture everything and maybe understand better.

Some wonders I have: Do you have too many questions for an emergent qualitative research? You mainly want to know what the hidden dynamics are in your qual. class that includes so many disparate learners—right? I always worry that too many a priori questions may narrow findings.

Something I found interesting in Denzin and Lincoln’s *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (2008) that may interest you: Stacy Holman Jones writes about the challenge of carrying out autoethnography: “It is the challenge of creating texts that unfold in the intersubjective space of individual and community and that embrace tactics for both knowing and showing (Jackson, 1993; Kemp, 1998, p. 116),” (Holman Jones, 2008, p. 210). She continues: “Responding to this challenge means asking questions about . . . How emotions are important to understanding and theorizing the relationship among self, power, and culture. Autoethnographic texts focus on creating a palpable emotional experience as it connects to, and separates from, other ways of knowing, being, and acting in/on the world (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 1995, 1997; Jago, 2002; Spry, 2001),” (Holman Jones, p. 210). This is a Sage, Los Angeles publication. I will be happy to bring it to you if you like.

From my notes. Ok Dear Colleagues, Students, and Self, that’s all I need. I feel strong now. I am ready to move on. As Dr, Phil, the psychotherapist on TV says, “We can do this!”

Theoretical Perspective Undergirding the Inquiry

It’s time to provide the theoretical perspective that positions this research. However, right now I am still pondering about how to situate this (to me) nonconventional text. Therefore, I make a decision to follow the advice I give my doctoral students: “If you are having trouble thinking or writing you probably have not thought or read enough.”

So, I step back from my writing and read *Final negotiations: A story of love loss, and chronic illness* by Carolyn Ellis (1995). I’ve wanted to read this book for a long time and I have a hunch that Ellis will supply some insights and also get my narrative discourse writing juices flowing. I am not disappointed. She urges researchers to write in the first person and to be present in the research. Ellis (1995) also says researchers should tell how they feel within the inquiry and insert vignettes and emotion. But, I learn

more from Ellis than I expected. I learn about sacrifice and a life devoted to another. I learn, I hope, to be a kinder person – not a gentler person. Ellis is not gentle in my opinion. She is brave, fearless, - she goes all out for what she believes is right- she makes a decision and she honors that decision. After reading Ellis’s account I know I made the correct decision to ground the inquiry in postmodern narrative inquiry. It feels right. Like Ellis, I am brave now.

Postmodern Narrative Inquiry

Some attempts at of narrative forms of inquiry can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2007). However, until the 1960s many qualitative researchers avoided this approach, judging narrative as ill suited for rigorous explorations (Alvermann, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Currently, narrative is reshaping qualitative inquiry in virtually every human science discipline and practicing profession (Riessman, 2006, p. 1). There is no single definition of narrative. Although narrative had its intellectual beginnings in the humanities, narrative has many meanings and is considered differently by different disciplines. Narrative genre includes memoir, biography, autobiography, diaries, archival documents, medical records, folk ballads, photographs, drawings, and other visual images. Despite such varied forms “narrative is always strongly autobiographical” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121) and gives emphasis to time, place, incidents, and the voice of the researcher (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In fact, narrative researchers must consciously insert themselves into the inquiry. Narrative permits researchers to make their thinking, concerns, joys, and confusions public and to join their stories with study participants “to form new stories that are collaborative in nature” (Webster & Mertova, p. 88). Interestingly, Alvermann notes researchers are always present in their texts no matter how they might attempt to conceal themselves.

Narrative is often used interchangeably with story (Riessman, 1993; 2008) and contains elements associated with stories, such as characters, settings, and connecting events that unfold sequentially over time. However, many scholars believe there is a difference between the terms, narrative and story. For example, Frank (2000) points out people tell stories but “narratives come from the analysis of stories” (p. 4).

Despite the emerging presence of narrative inquiry in varied disciplines, some scholars reject a narrative approach. For example, “narrative study has been criticized as being more art than research” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 1). In addition, Cizek (1995) wonders, “if all knowledge is a personalized construction—then can any interpretist’s claims be rejected?” (p. 27). Fenstermacher (1994) also questions narrative research when he asks, “How, in the use of stories and narratives, are such problems as self-deception, false claims, and distorted perceptions confronted and resolved?” (p. 218). Riessman (2008) comments on other potential negative aspects of narrative. She says while narratives can provide a way for individuals to make sense of the present or the past, narrative can also serve self-seeking purposes. For example, narratives can justify one’s inappropriate actions, persuade others to accept one’s own misaligned point of view, deliberately mislead, and intentionally misinform (2008). Nonetheless, despite some shortcomings, narrative is well suited for providing an account of individual’s experiences. Scholars, such as Bruner (1991, 1996), Gergen (1994), Gergen and Gergen

(1996, 2000), and Polkinghorne (2007) “advocate that personal narratives in both facets of content and form are people’s identities” (Lieblich et al., p. 7) and this approach invites and permits others to enter narrators’ worlds and vicariously experience their realities (Riessman, 2008).

I know now that as a qualitative researcher I have become deeply entranced, and in love with narrative inquiry. I am intrigued with Pinnegar and Daynes’ (2007) assertion that qualitative researchers have to move through stages of qualitative understanding and development in order to get to the point of embracing narrative. They state, “We become narrative inquirers only when we recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship” (p. 7). I am sure they are correct.

Moving Forward

I notice a difference in my students’ e-mail stories beginning with the fourth week of class. They have begun to share their perceptions, feelings, confusions, and understandings with one another and with me. They have also commenced to learn on their own, learn from others in the class, and to make sense of, and connect what they are learning in Qualitative Research Methods #1 with their life experiences. It seems as if telling our stories has helped us to remember long ago incidents and recall recent events and to use those occurrences as a way to explain personal decisions. For example, we’ve been immersed in autoethnography and Leanna, a special education major, originally from Capeverde who emigrated to Portugal with her family to escape political persecution, and later emigrated to the United States, writes a message in which she links past and recent critical events in her personal life to our class discussions.

Leanna’s story. *(Central theme, She is no longer the same woman she was because of her doctoral work; subject positioning, wife, mother, recently separated from her husband, strong woman; secondary theme, She is in a male dominated society but she is tough.*

Truly the assessment of an autoethnographical piece is heavily imbedded in what the reader brings to the table. It is in the interaction of reader’s experiences and writer/researcher exposure that meaning is created. The Ellis/Bochner (2000) chapter opens with a phone conversation between the two, which exposes their marriage and relationship in the intersection of their professional lives. I am currently struggling with a very recent marriage separation. Those around me tell me that my professional choices impacted my marriage. I have also heard numerous times that I “have changed”. All this is generally punctuated by “I want the old one back”. I am no longer the same. As a female in a male dominated society, I am to feel guilty for my professional choices, and my struggle against acquiescing to the expectation others have of me. True, that I have changed. The expectation is that for me change should not have happened. I am a female, mother, a wife and as such I have no right to change into what feels more comfortable. If I do I must negotiate the release of certain roles. I no longer accept things as is. The

conversation between Ellis and Bochner (2000) showed me the other side, increased my sensibilities towards what I am feeling, and for a brief moment established the certainty that I may not be totally wrong about certain things I am feeling. They did not construct this dialogue to be an autoethnographical piece. However by allowing the reader to "listen to their conversation" they provided close to an autoethnographical experience.

From my notes. Other students seem to have morphed into entirely different people than they were when the class started. (Perhaps not - Do not assume). Perhaps they now are willing to show parts of themselves. Deondra, a literacy student who is passionate and knowledgeable about statistics and technology and who shared little of herself in her other messages ("It was a fun class☺") writes about coming to understand the possibilities and boundaries of autoethnography because of collaboration with two of her peers.

Deondra's story. *(Central theme, learning new ways to think; out of comfort zone; subject positioning, others are great thinkers and she is not on the same wave length as they are, secondary themes, now understands how to write and not tell everything; now excited to write):*

Last night helped me look into myself and realize how little decisions made huge differences in my life. Working with James and Luis has been eye opening! They are great thinkers and they are on a different wavelength than I am so their ideas and the things they talk about intrigue me. I have been struggling with autoethnography because really getting inside my life and telling the story of why I am here is so personal I don't want it out there. But, James shared his autoethnographic outline and I realized I could start with one big event that impacted who I am now. I don't need to tell certain things I am not comfortable sharing. Now I am excited to write. I feel like I am writing a story and because it is about me I know what to say. I got out of my comfort zone but this stretches my mind. I am learning new ways to think.

From my notes. This week, Wade, a science major, who is originally from Jamaica, helped illuminate how anxious some students were about entering Qualitative #1. I viewed him as a calm, relaxed person who never exhibited any overt tensions in class. But his message to me revealed he had some initial concerns about qualitative methods. That's something I need to consider at the beginning of every semester. We all get edgy about succeeding at something new. Wade examines his thinking about autoethnography in relationship to his life in Jamaica. Has autoethnography helped some students begin to feel comfortable in Qualitative #1, or is it that we have been together now for over a month?

Wade's story. *(Central theme, initial fears of qualitative class are diminishing; self positioning, a student of qualitative research, secondary theme, feeling relief):*

As a class, it seems as if our initial fear of qualitative research are finally getting behind us. We, as a group, seem relaxed in comparison to a few weeks ago. I am now getting a better understanding of what qualitative research is about and what it has to offer and I truly believe that chapter 3 of Patton is the chapter that did it for me. I really resonate with the readings of autoethnography and this has helped me to be more conscious of my past experiences in Jamaica and the US as well as the experience I am going through as a doctoral student and as a member of this class. I remember Dr. P talking last semester about the many areas of qualitative research in his course titled, Philosophy of Inquiry. However, this class is the one to really drive home the point of qualitative research. I wonder what were the real reasons behind our earlier fear of qualitative research?

From my notes. Other students in the project feel at ease enough to critique the partial draft of this manuscript that I send them electronically. Anna, a second language acquisition student writes:

Anna's story. *(Central theme, tentatively shares her insights about the theoretical perspectives that I (Dr. R) struggle with to undergird the inquiry; subject positioning; takes on the role of collaborator in the inquiry, secondary themes, offers her insights about the manuscript)*

Dr. R I just read the partial manuscript you sent us and I'm going to go out on a limb with this comment so please don't banish me to the gallows for it. In the "Theoretical Perspectives Undergirding the Inquiry" section I struggled to understand whether this was a narrative inquiry, phenomenological inquiry or both. It is clear that you are still trying to flesh out this section and as you have stated in class and in the opening vignette of the section you are struggling with how to ground this inquiry. I think I share your insights that it is both: narrative and phenomenological. We are using text (i.e., emails) to narrate our stories but our stories in this case are our lived experiences of the class' phenomenon. I read a nice quote about narrative inquiry that I would like to share: Ros i Sole (2007) said, "Narratives are embedded in social action by being both a reflection on human experience and a way to articulate the ties the narrator has with different social groups and their behaviors" (p. 207).

From my notes. Some students continue to struggle with revealing themselves to themselves and to others. I understand. Grumet (1991) asserts that telling a story about the self is risky because it requires giving part of oneself away. Sandra, a math major, explains how she wants mediators to tell her story because it is hard for her to talk about her self.

Sandra's story. *(Central theme, struggles with writing her life history; subject positioning, a modest person; secondary themes, explains how she has figured out how to write her autoethnographic account):*

I am still struggling with writing my life history and turning it into an autoethnographic account. I am a modest person so it is hard for me to talk about myself. Chapter 3 of the Patton (2002) text gives an example of Edmund Morris, the historian who wrote a quasi-autoethnographic account of Ronald Regan's life. Morris created fictional characters to act as his eyes and ears for this work. I thought it might be interesting for me to write my life history from the perspective of those who have known me best. Then I could reflect upon how others perceive me. I think this is an important aspect of knowing myself. My characters would not be fictional though. On more thing- our Academic Writing Book (Richards & Miller, 2005) is almost like therapy to me- it helped me view myself as a writer.

From my notes. Other students have not yet settled in. They are still anxious, confused, frustrated, unsettled, and unsure. Mark, another science major, writes:

Mark's story. *(Central theme (uncomfortable with class assignments and syllabus; subject positioning, victim; secondary themes, tired, anxious):*

I am slowly but surely getting more comfortable at being uncomfortable. I am trying very hard to understand the purpose of this class, as it is unlike anything I have experienced. Don't get me wrong, I do not mean that in a contrarian fashion. Most classes are straightforward with assignment directly tied to content. This class seems to be two tracks. We are assigned readings that expose us to different types of qualitative research, but it would seem the writing assignments tied to those readings are more about learning to write in a different manner than we are accustomed. Perhaps more comments on our returned papers about the content would make me feel better or maybe not.

The syllabus is still a mystical entity. The usability of it does not seem to work for me. Perhaps, it is because each night is broken into different sections making it hard to follow and assignments seem to vanish into the text. I do feel better that I am not alone in my confusion. Last week wasn't as bad, but the first two weeks many of were asking each other what was due.

I am enjoying the presentations. I have learned from them, but the bar has been set high. I hope I can keep the level high for my presentation. I finished my autoethnographic piece today, or should I say I have a version (as this genre is never finished). I wish I had another week. Having felt very tired the past couple of weeks, working at night after a day of

teaching has not worked out well. I feel guilty not doing my normal thorough job.

From my notes. I worry about Mark. His “uncomfortableness” troubles me. I woke up at 2AM last night worried about his concerns. He’s correct. The syllabus is confusing although I have worked on it for three semesters to streamline it. He also mentions how I edit students’ two-page responses to assigned readings. He makes a good point. I edit conventions of written language for students and ask them to redo their work for a grade. Since the content of students’ work is excellent, I have neglected to offer my positive comments about this part of their thinking. I’ll remember this.

From my notes. Leanna turned in her autoethographic piece. It is exquisite – what Richardson (2000) calls creative and analytic, connecting the personal to the cultural and political and what Knowles and Cole (2008) consider ethnodramatic. Leanna offers an aesthetic account that describes her trauma about leaving Capeverde at age six because of political instability. After reading the poem and Leanna’s other writings, I told her I sensed sadness and melancholy within her and she agreed.

Leanna’s poem story. (*Central theme, trauma, a crucial moment in her life that defines her, subject positioning, refugee, secondary theme, importance of education, questions*):

I have often sat to write about my life experiences and my own personal feelings regarding certain aspects of my life. I have come to realize that my leaving Capeverde, at the age of six, due to political instability was a crucial and definite moment in my life. My arrival and subsequent adaptation in Lisbon, Portugal was nothing short of traumatic. My adaptation to the United States also presented difficulties. These difficulties were mostly grounded in the contradictions that I saw and felt within the socio-political context. Through these life events I gained a sense of self and I struggled to hold on to that which made me unique. In connecting the dots I felt compelled to sit and give wide brush strokes of those events, which have defined who I am.

Yes, I know

I live in between spaces

I remember.

The heat emanating from the metal

The billowing black smoke

The chanting and drumming that capture my senses...Tabanca

The men rolled the car down hill

Suddenly a great big ball of fire

Took control of the sand

Invading the calm

Pristine shores of Praia Negra.

A strong tug on my upper arm
Accompanied by a squeal- Na janela não!*

I fell 3 feet backward
In the uncertainty of the times,
And with a skip of a heartbeat
The curtains were closed...
And the first act was finished...

The smell of fried *fijós* in *nha Olga's* kiss
The yellow wool short suit
That caressed my skin
And the muffled humming of the plane engine
These are the memories that make up a
Corner of my life.
Why?
Why did Cabral have to die?
Leaving Capeverde at the mercy
Of those who killed and lied?
Forcing our lives to change
Dumping me in a country so strange?

I thought Lisbon was paradise
When red carnations fell from the sky
On April 25 1974.
Soon realized this ain't no paradise
Men paraded with machine guns
While women stood in lines
Forced to identify with the oppressor
A constant undeniable
Impending sense of disagreeable change
It was evident
That my color was problematic
Not entirely white
Not fully black- not a fit
11 years stranded
In a culture that wasn't mine
It was underhanded
Crossed the Atlantic once
Crossed the Atlantic twice
A time of penance
10 years in ice
I ask
Why not make this world a better place?

Today,
I believe education is the process

By which we can reduce social suffering
 Those at the bottom must have access to resources
 Those at the top must have the opportunity
 To understand their relationship to power

I believe that the function of education goes well beyond the textbook
 It is in fact the vehicle to creating a more just world
 Education is the ultimate action,
 The act of educating and allowing oneself to be educated
 Is a political act!

I live in between spaces
 I know.
 I remember,
 So, I believe.

From my notes. Oh, what a perfect qual student Leanna is. She feels. She cares. She searches to understand who she is. She writes beautifully. But she is not the only exemplary student in the class. All of my students are wonderful. They are a different place than when they began Qualitative #1. That's all a teacher can ask, isn't it? I too am in a different place.

I feel better. I met with Mark and it was a good meeting, I think. He is overwhelmed with his responsibilities teaching high school science because administrators continue to place more demands on teachers in his district. In addition, every time I return papers to Mark I have edited conventions of written language that need correction. He must be tired of having to redo papers and I don't blame him. Thank God his autoethnography piece is stellar. I cannot wait until he sees my comments on his autoethnography paper.

From my notes. Lacey, the former engineer, sends me an e-mail. It's like a prize-yes, that's what I call it –a prize. She reminisces about being a little girl and learning how to swim and connects her story with her current status as a student in the class. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that as inquirers “we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories” (p. 60). “People are historical beings retaining as part of themselves their previous experiences. Past experiences manifest themselves in the present as habits and are partially available through recollection.” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 17; also see Bruner, 1987). Lacey's story makes me feel great. She's “getting it”. Stop again. I must not predetermine themes, but the same theme about me keeps popping up. I want my students to be happy and successful in Qualitative #1. I want to be happy in Qualitative #1. I want them to “get it.”

Lacey's story. (*Central theme, a remembered experience about a near drowning and being saved by her father, subject positioning, a long way to go as a qualitative researcher, but achieving some success, secondary theme, not ready to be alone in qualitative initiatives*):

I was thinking, on my long drive home from class, about being a small girl in Texas. I was about five years old. We lived on the border of Mexico on an Air Force base. My father took my younger brother and me every weekend to the base pool. My father was a state ranked swimmer in college and was very comfortable around the water. He shared that love with my brother and me. My mother never got in the water with us and we later learned she had a few accidents in the water and almost died twice. She was afraid of transferring her fear to us so she stayed out. I was fearless in the water and my father was always in arms reach to make sure I never got into trouble. Part of my father's job as an Air Force fighter pilot trainer included some travel. I remember we were staying in a hotel with a pool. I don't remember why my father was not in the pool, but he instructed my brother and me to hold on to the edge of the pool and not let go. I remember thinking how stupid that was. I was a great swimmer. I didn't need to hold on, I could swim. I let go of the side and for some reason couldn't get my swimming legs. I sank. I was kicking and trying to get up to the surface but could not. The next thing I remember my father had jumped in the pool with all his clothes on to get me.

Why did I think of this tonight? That's the part I had to reflect on and process. I finally concluded that it's where I am in the class. I think I've gotten the hang of it and am starting to believe I know more than I really do. In reality, my successes have been because my coach (Dr R) has always been within arms reach and has never let me sink. I'm realizing that I don't know as much as I thought I did and I still have a long way to go -- but I am much more proficient than when I first started. My swimming story did not end badly. My father was smart enough to not make a big deal out of it and kept encouraging me to swim -- with him safely in reach to catch me if needed. Gradually he could get father away until I was able to swim completely on my own. I am hoping for the same end to my qualitative research story. I have started to swim a little on my own. I submitted an article I hope to have published eventually. But I realize that I am not ready to be completely on my own. I am still dependant on my support system to keep my going, to keep learning and to get stronger. I still am not experienced enough to know when I am in danger and when I am safe to proceed. I guess this is the "crisis" moment when you begin to backslide as you develop a new skill. At first you know nothing. Then when someone makes it look easy you get a false sense of security that you too can do it well. You try only to realize it is not as easy as it looked. At least when I was learning to swim I was not forced to a fifteen week time constraint. I'm wondering if I will drown when I leave this class and attempt to swim on my own? How long will I be able to tread water? Will I be able to hold my breath and keep trying?

I know my lessons will continue next semester in the next class. Will that be enough? Will I be able to swim without floaties by then?

Further Along

As the semester moves forward, all sorts of great ideas from students begin to pop up. What thinkers they are. Their honesty is more than I ever expected. Conchita, another special education major and a high school administrator, shares:

Conchita's story. (*Central theme, relief about coming to understand something about qualitative research, subject positioning, maintaining own identity, secondary theme, power of experiential learning*):

Wow! I loved class tonight! I can't believe how much we have learned in such a few short weeks. I understood completely now why you said you use the newspaper to find investigative situations makes perfectly good sense! I'm so glad I squeezed into the class!! Boy, I remember the first day I walked into class and I was going to take your seat and you said with a smile on your face, "That's my seat!" Oh lord, I was scared of you!!! The first thought that came to my mind was, "It's gonna be a long semester." But, I was wrong. When I first began the doctoral program I used to fear I would become like some professors, robotic almost (won't mention names), so you are a breath of fresh air, so down to earth, very genuine and funny and now I know I can still maintain my self identity, doctorate or not! Thanks for allowing us to be experiential learners, that's how I learn the best and I can't wait for the vignettes.

From my notes. I start to feel great but then, I discover not everything is perfect (Note that recurring theme in my writing. I want students to be happy. I want everything to be perfect). Some students are tired. They work hard all day and then they take this 4-semester hour class on Monday evenings. Some take more than one class per semester (even three courses) and many live a great distance from campus. Some must care for elderly parents. And, Leanna's e-mail stories continue to hint of sadness and somber thoughts. She writes that connecting to the soul of others is exhausting and mentions qualitative researchers' vulnerabilities.

Leanna's story. (*Central theme, exhaustion, subject positioning, developing as a researcher, secondary theme qualitative research must be done with rigor*):

It is mid-semester and things are getting harder. I left the class on Monday planning to complete my reflection over dinner. I was tired and overwhelmed and after a shower I fell asleep with no reflection or dinner. It is the end of the week and only now I am feeling with some control. The class was great. My favorite activity was to work as a group developing the research questions. It is amazing how each group tackled it from such a different perspective. I think that planning a research

project upfront is reinvigorating. The snags that we find may take some energy however the beginning is so exciting. There are so many possibilities. The more I learn about qualitative research the more I feel that it must be done with rigor. I begin to feel offended by articles reading qualitative research projects that are full of holes. It feels like it makes the rest of us vulnerable to our peers who have an inclination for quantitative research. I often make this picture that qualitative researchers are able to connect to the participants in the soul, while quantitative researchers prefer the more disconnected outlook. Connecting to the soul of others is exhausting and calls on our own vulnerabilities. I think that my peers that are strong advocates for T-tests, correlation studies, factorial ANOVAs, and etc look at those of us who believe in the power of qualitative research and think, ..."hum they cannot do Math!" I can do Math! I prefer to leave the counting to other people. It does not mentally engage me in anyway. Besides my questions are more in the nature of how did this happen? Rather than how often did it happen?

I feel a bit more settled in this world of research. Less anxiety, less doubts about what I am capable. I am certain that I am capable of better than some of the stuff that I have read lately. I really like the way you set up your manuscripts. The framework is comprehensive and easy to follow. Your knowledge of theorizing and supporting your research in theoretical or conceptual framework is impressive. That is what I want to do well. I was able to clearly see the use of sociocultural perspective and the need for seeing the data from crystallization imagery. I clearly pictured the participant in the middle (rotating) being influenced by a multitude of social factors. These influences can also be internal or intrapersonal (i.e., character, attitudes, dispositions, etc.). Berliner in several of his articles and presentations states the complexities of social sciences in conducting research. He is horrified by the minimization and simplification of human experiences. Maybe constructivists, post-modernists are people that are more willing to admit their inability to get at the bottom of it all and post-positivists just cannot accept this idea. Critical theorists feel that all around us binds and prevents us from being liberated while pragmatists would like for everything to function in harmony. Aren't these feelings or needs in the perception of the world connected to our personalities, beliefs and attitude towards life?

From my notes. Then Wade questions his teaching of science to high school students in relationship to our simulation activities. Like Leanna, he writes in a reflective, sensitive, manner.

Wade's story. *(Central theme, angry at self because of his research biases, and lack of understanding of qualitative research, subject positioning, looking inward at self, secondary theme, questions his teaching):*

As I reflect on my experience in tonight's class, I can't help but wonder how effective my teaching is. It is clear students learn more for experiential work than from lectures. Tonight, I can truly say I learned from the simulation we did in our small groups. Based on the story you shared of the elderly lady and her garden gnomes we had to use the information to identify a rational, research question, the type of study to carry out as a result of the information, and the limitation (s) of our study. Not thinking carefully enough, many of us reported studies that were biased. I was extremely biased in my views that this lady had an obsession with gnomes and that she was too old to give information that would allow me as the researcher to understand if she did have an obsession with gnomes. Where did that come from? How did I know that? Why did I say that? Although I fool myself sometimes into thinking that I am an aspiring researcher, tonight clearly shows otherwise. From my observation and analysis of this activity, I was able to walk away with the reinforcement of knowing that little activities like the Gnome exercise has enormous impact students learning. I learned what not to do in any study. This activity shows us we need to be mindful whenever we conduct our larger studies.

From my notes. So once again I am feeling somewhat safe and secure because some students are "getting it." They feel successful and comfortable. But, then I am reminded that others still have doubts and uncertainties about their abilities to do qualitative research. For example Conchita sends me this candid message:

Conchita's story. (*Central theme, berating herself because she feels inadequate as a qualitative researcher, subject positioning, not worthy, secondary theme, anxiety*):

Dr. R! Honestly, I feel ignorant sometimes when we participate in the group simulations. Leanna and Kate overwhelm me with their knowledge. I constantly ask myself "Do I belong here?" "What type of brain do I have that I can't articulate and conclude the way they do?" Whew! It gets very stressful at times, and then there's you, I want to make sure that I can produce writing that will be to your expectation, but it seems like I take two steps forward then one step back! Why? How do I find the happy medium and develop to the standards of a doctoral student desiring to be a qualitative researcher? I'm stressing at this moment! I'm thinking of all the work that I as a school administrator must complete to make sure my students have a good testing environment, while at the same time, I am stressing because I have to present! Why can't I understand and apply theoretical perspectives to a research initiative? Where am I lacking. I'm almost at the end of my doctoral work and think to myself "Should I be here? How have I managed to make the grade to get me to this point?" So many lingering questions!!! Monday's class gave me a little boost because I can actually formulate a question that is satisfactory to the group and to you! I looked straight at you when I was presenting

and felt an aura of comfort when you smiled as I articulated what our question was for the article study. I imagine that there is a qualitative researcher within me. I just have to get it out before the semester is over! I feel sometimes that it's going very fast, too fast for me to keep up and I will not make the cut! Will I ever be like you? I would like to be! Give us more articles! It seems like since Monday, everything I read and hear I find myself trying to make research questions out of everything. I ponder theoretical perspective: is it autoethnography, or phenomenology, or maybe it's a constructivist view. I learned about constructivist theory in Dr. P's Philosophies of Inquiry! When you said Monday, "Sometimes we have to go outside the norm of traditional theoretical perspectives," it made me feel a little bit of comfort. I must be honest and say that I think I may be lacking a little in the in depth reading and that's why I am struggling! I spend a lot of time reviewing the articles but seem to fall short of where I should be. I will keep working hard, and hopefully by the end of the semester I will feel that I am "close" to making the cut for entry into the qualitative research arena!

Conchita's e-mail communication to members of her collaborative group. (*Central theme, feeling inadequate, subject positioning, struggling, secondary theme, overwhelmed*):

Ok ladies, so I have to admit, I feel like a loser! You both just overwhelm me sometimes at how much you know and can articulate. I felt a little bit of comfort when we did the article exercise and you both actually liked the question I formulated that should guide our study. I felt like a pro, only for a minute, but now, I'm feeling helpless and lost as to what our presentation is supposed to be. I have struggled with making time to read the chapter with all sorts of standardized testing facing me at school. I am doing my job and that of the vacant admin position we have at our school, and I can feel it slowly wearing me down. Please let me know what I'm supposed to be doing because the last thing I want to do is let Dr. R down. She seems to always have it so together. Sometimes I think that I will be ABD because I avoid writing like I avoid the plague, how in the world will I become a full-fledged doctor? I don't know, I'm feeling a little overwhelmed and small within our group right about now!

My e-mail response to Conchita.

Hi- I think you need to consider where you were when you began this course and where you are now. That should make you feel good about yourself. I also think you are right about your depth of reading. You need to go on a qualitative reading spree and read everything you can about qualitative research. For example, I have just completed Carolyn Ellis' (1995) book that I passed around in class last Monday evening- the story of her relationship with her partner, Gene who was dying. The work

touched me. I needed to read something that was written in a narrative discourse style- the style I am using now in our research project. I learned something from Ellis. I learned about writing narrative discourse. But, I learned more about sacrifice and a life devoted to another. I think I learned to be a kinder person-I tend to have considerable hubris and once before I vowed to get over this dimension of my affective self-but I forgot- so this was a reminder. So-you see, I am still learning just as we all are still learning in the class. We all started at different places with respect to qual and we are ending up at a better understanding of qual. I will never stop learning-and neither will you. Here is another slice of the manuscript for you to read and consider- See you Monday DRR

From my notes. Great news! Something wonderful happened to Conchita.

Conchita's message. (*Central theme, euphoria, subject positioning, self as researcher, secondary theme, explanation of an research project*):

Dr. R! I just got a study approved through the IRB. I'm very excited about it! I haven't conducted the study because I just got the approval. It's an interesting study and I wanted to see if I could use it as my PowerPoint presentation in a couple of weeks. I have to add some parts to it because of the outline you gave us. The title of the study is *Perspectives and Experiences of Parents from Migrant Backgrounds Regarding their Understanding of their Children's Disability and the Special Education Process*.

From my notes. But now, Lola is overwhelmed with professional and personal responsibilities. This inquiry has illuminated how hard my students work and how they want to succeed in this class. They have responsibilities besides Qualitative #1- spouses, partners, children, elderly parents, long commutes to and from class, other classes, illness, work. Lola's e-mail message highlights their emotional quandaries:

Lola story. (*Central theme, exhaustion, subject positioning, chaos and turmoil in her life, secondary theme, qualitative research grows clearer each week*):

I no longer know what week it is!!!!!! I think I handed in the wrong write-up last night. My car is a mess. My kitchen is a mess. My office is just as bad. Ugh! This is the time of fall semester when I scream, "We need a spring break!" Fall is so intense with its long spell from August till Thanksgiving. Why aren't there more holidays? I have been grading midterms like mad so that I can go out tomorrow night -- my birthday :). I remember one of our guest speakers saying how much she sacrificed for this degree. I understand... and I am nowhere near done! How many more years? I move from one task to the next and can never give 100% to anything. And yet I often wonder what it would be like to have no kids, husband, students, or committee meetings... Could I immerse myself in

reading and research, writing and inquiry? I doubt it. I am a Libra after all. I need chaos to seek harmony and distraction to find balance. Don't most of us?

Last night I was not well prepared for class and was thus less engaged in the presentation than I might have been. I had only skimmed the chapter, and those questions in the jeopardy game the presenters devised targeted my lack of preparation. The activity was fun and lent support to the notion that competition sparks learning and enthusiasm; we do have some personalities in our class! The simulations continue to amaze and inspire us to ask why... and in what ways... More importantly, we have learned to design studies that will enable us to answer our questions. This is what grows clearer each week for me. Still a novice, I remain humble yet grateful for the moments of clarity that creep up in class and/or when I read. Now I am waiting for such insights to increase in frequency and depth. It worries me we only have a little more than a month left together and so much to learn! I wonder if my classmates share this angst. Well, all I can do is return to my comfort zone - back to reading essays! So much to say but only a little time right now.

From my notes. I send my next draft of this manuscript again to the study participants. Sandra writes back:

Sandra's response. (*Central theme, connections between manuscript and class discussion, subject positioning, collaborating in the research, secondary theme, emotional about what is shared in the manuscript*):

Thanks for sharing the manuscript with me. It has truly evolved since the last time you shared it, what, maybe four to five weeks ago. Now after reading this draft I can see the connections between what you have written about and the things you share during class - your reading of Ellis, your slices, layers, and segment comments. I have to say this is the first time in my academic life that I am witnessing first-hand my professor struggle to craft a written piece of work and meanwhile I am struggling to complete course assignments for the semester. Professors don't share these things. Students are supposed to see perfection, a completed project, a published manuscript - not the effort, the questioning, and the incompleteness of a draft. Thanks for sharing and opening up to us too.

You asked for comments on the manuscript: I only have a couple. As mentioned above, it is helpful to read another individual's work in progress. It demonstrates to me yet another way to handle the writing process. For instance, it was helpful for me to see that you had incomplete sentences or thoughts peppered throughout your manuscript. This looked like a good writing strategy and it may be one I try to incorporate into my own ways. In regard to anything that I did not like about the manuscript

thus far, I can honestly say nothing. As a math major this is a style/genre that is unfamiliar to me so I don't feel qualified to offer a critique. Upon reading the manuscript, I must say I was most struck by my colleague's writing of their experiences - life, classroom and in general. I certainly hope others who have read this agree with me too. The vignettes are captivating, real, in some cases poetic, as you said. I want to read them again and again because in some cases they offer validation; in others I am captivated by their thoughts and in yet others I want to learn of their experiences. I actually have to say I became emotional many times while reading through the manuscript.

Only Four Weeks Left: Some Tensions Continue

Conchita's story. (*Central theme, berating herself again, class was challenging, subject positioning, stressed, secondary theme, benefits of collaborative activities*):

Dr. R! Class was very challenging yesterday! First off, we thought we would get to present and had prepared all weekend long and then didn't get to present, I was fine with it because it gives us another week to perfect our presentation. Then, when we did the group exercise. I felt a lot of tension among our group members because we couldn't get our study together. I felt responsible because I chose the article! We didn't get very far and had to put more parts of it together at the beginning of the class discussion. It felt very stressful! It gave me a glimpse I believe, of what it's going to be like during a real research study. I find it difficult at times to put my thoughts together and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to engage in these activities. I think these are the activities that are really "driving it home" for me. Please do not stop doing them! Theoretical perspectives and how to choose them is becoming clearer to me! Oh, gotta go, I will come back to this later (testing this week and it's driving me up the wall!)

From my notes. Conchita is happy!

Conchita's message. (*Central theme, happiness, subject positioning, happy student, secondary theme, developing insights*):

Hi Dr. R! I have been trying to write you since last night, I swear this job is driving me crazy! I wanted to let you what a wonderful night I had last night presenting. The wait was worth it. Talking about the "light bulb" coming on! I can't wait for my research proposal presentation. All of sudden I'm thinking about theoretical frameworks, rationale, literature, and all these wonderful things that make for a good research study! I have so enjoyed this class and I don't want it to be over.

From my notes. Webster and Mertova (2007) comment that individual's understandings of people and events change over time. Mark's latest e-mail to me underscores this temporality of thinking and experience. He seems happy (my recurring theme).

Mark's story. (*Central theme, relief, subject positioning, happy student, secondary theme, considering a research project in conjunction with his new job*):

Wow, a writing class that you will offer for doctoral students next fall sounds great for the class! That should be the perfect time for me. With my new job taking me out of the classroom, I was a bit concerned on how to conduct research. With this class, I now realize that it isn't a problem and may be even better. I was struggling on how to fit all my pieces of interest together (nature of science, technology, and writing). Since my new job involves creating a new STEM-based curriculum for middle school, I can look at how teachers cope with the new curriculum and its effectiveness on students, or something like that. I can now fit it all in. Yahoo!!!! There will probably be a quantitative piece for student gains, but it could mostly be qualitative. If I went straight quantitative on all those pieces, it would be one dull piece of writing. Ha! I'm fine with what you have written; although it is strange to have someone state they are worried about me. The redo's are nothing. I don't give them a thought. I just think finally someone is willing to teach me something new. If I weren't interested in learning new things, I wouldn't be here. I am also getting better reading the syllabus.

Two Weeks Left

From my notes. I'm getting weary like my students. It's time for the class to be over. I think my fatigue is partially related to this narrative inquiry. As Leanna wrote earlier, "Connecting to the soul of others is exhausting." I have discovered a lot about my students and me. There is an interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). Our stories have helped to forge strong bonds among us. I care when my students are tired, in despair, overwhelmed, worried, confused. I rejoice when they are happy. We are in this together and I am completely connected to my students. Once again Leanna writes poetry, although in a narrative form. Her voice shines through her piece. She ends by summing up what I hope all of my students remember about qualitative research.

Leanna's story. (*Central theme, contentment and peace, subject positioning, description of self at peace, secondary theme, qualitative research requires skill in using words and observation*):

It is a beautiful night outside. It is the perfect Florida fall weather. I wonder if I could count all the stars spread across the black mantle that covers the blue afternoon sky. I am able to count several but somewhere

before finishing I lose my place and start from scratch. I am stubborn and I insist on counting. I feel that a number would give reason to this night. I made several attempts.

Finally I quit and just gaze at the flickering lights hanging careless on top of my head. I try to describe to myself what I am seeing. At first I use simple words. However slowly I notice that I am searching for beautiful, powerful words. I wonder why? For a few minutes I take a deep breath, exhaling slowly. My heart is content for being here...surrounded by black, with flickering dots, in the deafness of the night...here in my driveway...seated on the hood of my car. There is a deep feeling of happiness...peace...in this serene moment. There is nothing beyond this moment...no worries, no regrets, no tears, no need for a future. There is just now and this enormous need to stretch this moment! My feelings are coming from somewhere.

I feel taken by the sway of the breeze, under the sparkle of the stars and in the mystery of the night. The most beautiful part of this night is the stars, no doubt! Their presence allows me to see the deepness of the black. The black of night alone just would not work! The fall breeze could carry memories away...but the stars...they give reason to the night! Counting them is so unfair and ascertaining their number is such a minimal gesture to describe their power when overtaking the human spirit. I can tell you, "There were many stars". But that alone does not tell you how gazing at them brings serenity and fullness of soul.

This semester I learned that understanding human experience requires words and observations of behaviors. We can count how many people have something, however until we engage in dialogue and observation, we are unable to understand the importance or impact of what we number. These words require care. They constitute evidence of true human experience. Careful planning prior to collecting them and careful handling following collection is necessary.

One of the most important characteristics of researchers is honesty when handling data. Everything that is handled loses a bit of its form. It loses some of its form to fit the researchers' experiences and understandings. It is like the sand bag that passes from hand to hand. Therefore researchers must connect to their experiences, know their character. They must reflect on their needs, motives, and their own limitations. They must disclose, become voluntarily vulnerable in favor of transparency. In many instances the value of their findings depends on self-disclosure.

I began this semester thinking that I could do qualitative research. I was convinced that once I learned the terminology, understood organizational strategies of data, interviewing techniques, general methodologies I was

equipped to conduct qualitative research. At the end of the semester, I am convinced that in order to do good qualitative research I must engage in collaborative efforts with other researchers. I must be open to the perspectives of others. I must be reflective. I must write well. I have the responsibility of reporting on the experience of others. I must continually grow; assess my growth and the impact of my growth on my understanding of others' experiences.

From my notes. It is almost the end of Qualitative Research Methods #1. But, this is not a children's fairy tale where we all end up completely happy and secure. Life is not that simple. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, human experience is complex. I discover that a few students continue to question their abilities as qualitative researchers.

Anna's story. (*Central theme, dissatisfaction with herself as a member of a collaborative group, subject positioning, inadequate student, secondary theme, questions herself*):

Why do I feel at the end of a group activity that I am unsatisfied with the result? Why do I feel that consensus amongst group members is never reached? Is it me? Am I a roadblock? Am I perfectly content with discussing an issue "to death" ultimately never reaching consensus and a final product? Why am I suddenly feeling this way now in my academic career? These are the things I have been thinking about today and wanted to share with you. For me, the concept of producing something/anything typically requires much contemplating, keeping an open mind to multiple approaches and mulling each of them over numerous times, and deliberate action ultimately. In short, when I have to produce it never comes quick and easy. Now add to that the additional dimensions of group dynamics and time constraints (as in last night) and I walk away from that experience feeling frankly not too good. I guess it makes me feel inadequate...inadequate about my ultimately level of participation (I'm not sure; I think I still need to think more deeply about what it is that I ultimately feel). But I do know that the feeling (whatever it's name is) raises questions in my own mind.

Sue's story. (*Central theme, the course was painful to her, subject positioning, a novice forced out of comfort zone, secondary theme, qualitative research is complex because it requires human interaction*):

The course was painful because I was forced out of my comfort zone where I felt knowledgeable and successful. At times I felt awkward and confused and I would spend hours reading Patton (2002) and research articles to become more informed of qualitative practices. There are numerous considerations to qualitative inquiry, such as the theoretical perspectives, researcher bias, how to phrase the research questions,

appropriate methods, limitations, etc., just to mention a few. It is quite complex because it involves human interactions. Also, the researcher must retain a certain amount of flexibility because of its dynamic qualities. Often it is a long process that can change drastically as the research progresses. I feel more comfortable with it now, but also realize I am a novice.

From my notes. Nonetheless, I believe most students are at peace- maybe more than at peace- they are joyful (My recurring theme: I want my students to be happy. Is this why I see what I see in the data?).

Wade's reflection.

There is an old Jamaica saying, "My-O-My." I could not help but think about this when I reflected on our last class on Monday. This is because we have truly come a long way since August.

Kelly's story. (*Central theme, summarizes her experiences as a Jamaican doctoral student in the class, subject positioning, content with self as a learner, secondary theme, She is thinking like a researcher*):

What a journey! I started out as an anxious first semester female doctoral student in early childhood education feeling overwhelmed and misplaced. I left Jamaica filled with zeal and determination to succeed and then it hit me - this is so much different from my master's studies. I will not be the solitary scientist Piaget speaks of. There is so much to learn from my colleagues. This semester in Qualitative #1 class I learned a lot from the discussions, class presentations, and especially the research proposals. After the first class I thought I would definitely be lost in this course. But, this class was a community of learners and the writings were frustrating sometimes (especially with the insistence on active voice) but it was a learning experience and in retrospect I am truly happy I did this course. I would really like to know when research will begin to inform policy makers' decisions. Here we have a group of passionate and critical thinkers who will engage in meaningful research projects. How many of these will be used as the knowledge base to make changes to the education system? Will they just be added to the archive for future students to quote?

I am not so anxious about the dissertation either. You need a topic that makes sense and research questions that you will be able to answer. The theoretical framework of the study is important, as this will guide your review of literature and analysis of data. You have to face your own biases and find ways to overcome them. I want to be able to do a dissertation that will change Jamaica. There are so many things I want to do when I return home and I do hope that by then my passion doesn't wane. One of my high school friends who is in the US army will be

deployed to Iraq next year. I shared my autoethnography with him and told him he could write his capturing the deployment experience in Iraq. Can you believe it? I am thinking like a researcher - yeah me!

Conchita's message.

I am inspired!!! This is great; I just sat for the last two hours helping a colleague put together a research proposal idea! I felt like the expert! And our manuscript that you just sent me? I absolutely love it. **Every word is true.**

Final Thoughts

This is the end. We've completed the class and our story (for now) is finished. So what have I learned? I learned a lot about narrative inquiry. I now understand what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mean when they say narrative inquiry is complex, and multilayered. It's difficult and exhausting to take on the responsibility of representing others' lives, hopes, dreams, confusions, pain and happiness. I've learned I am changed forever by this inquiry. I've come to recognize the power of shared stories. I know a little about what these particular doctoral students have lived and perceived and how they suffered anxiety, and confusion and grew as researchers in Qualitative Research Methods #1. I learned some doctoral students were "ecstatic" to complete Stats I and II and move on to Qualitative Methods. I discovered that just like my colleague, Mary Lou, gracefully and gently suggested to me, I didn't need to devise nine a priori questions pertinent to this research, and yet, every one of my questions has been answered through the inquiry. I found out that just because I want students to be happy does not make them happy I discovered I need to praise the content of my students' writing and not just comment on, and edit conventions of written language on their papers. I learned my students lead multifaceted lives beyond Qualitative Research Methods #1. I came to the conclusion that I had to analyze my students' stories because analyzation reveals and documents what truths reside in those stories. Through narrative analysis I learned how my students' emotions often swerved and changed course like they were on some shaky carnival ride. I learned how we are all emotional beings and to a large extent how our experiences impact our feelings about ourselves and affect our sense of identity. I also discovered I care more about my students than I ever recognized. I know our stories captured our lives and illuminated who we were, what we believed, what we knew, and what we did in the course (Goodson, 1992). And, I know that every word we shared in this inquiry is true.

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Authors' Note

Janet C. Richards is a professor in the Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Studies at the University of South Florida. She teaches graduate qualitative research and literacy courses. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to: Janet C. Richards, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Studies College of Education University of South Florida, 4202 East Fowler Avenue, Tampa, FL 33620; Phone: 813-948-9065; E-mail: JRichards@coedu.usf.edu

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