Doubt and excitement

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Doubt and Excitement:

An Experiential Learning Approach to Teaching the Practice of Qualitative Research

Abstract

This article diagnoses that qualitative research (QR) methods courses and literature often remain silent on how to actually *do* QR and explores how practice theory can improve learning and teaching the practice of QR. It develops an experiential learning approach of turning experiences and emotions of doubt and excitement into a dialogical process of asking creative questions, imagining new ideas, and animating a practical relationship to the world. Based on data and observations of a summer school course in QR methods to PhD students, we present three pedagogical practices for recognizing and tolerating affective resistances to experiential learning and finding creative solutions to emergent research problems.

Keywords: practice; qualitative research; learning; teaching; sociology of knowledge

Introduction: Learning and teaching the practice of qualitative research

Methods classes are the products of dominant disciplinary or departmental epistemic cultures. In that regard, they have been widely criticized for not equipping novice researchers with the disposition and skills to successfully design and execute a qualitative research (QR) project (Schwartz-Shea 2003; Yanow 2003; Hood 2006; Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2011; Haverland and Yanow, 2012; Stout, 2013). Even in the best of circumstances novice QRers usually face a curious combination of curiosity, excitement, anxiety and self-doubt at the start of their research (Author 2 2011a, ch. 9).[1] On the one hand, they feel ill equipped because they do not have much more than a topic and a field, while, on the other hand, they are often invested in a pet theory or method and some strong convictions (Booth et al. 1995). If this situation is not handled well, they risk diverging into several common dysfunctions: hiding behind a grand wall of theorizing, endless collection of data without analyzing them or knowing when to stop, or foregrounding a preferred method without a clear research question. Often, encouraged by dominant doctrines of the uniformity of methods in social science research, they will cling to methods as perspicuous, categorical bits of intervention that provide some illusory certainty for engaging in the contingent practice of research.

The extant literature and pedagogical practice are mainly focused on raising methodological awareness of the theory and practice of QR, particularly by clarifying the philosophical presuppositions of interpretivism, the variety in qualitative methods, and their value and dilemmas with regards to answering core questions of respective fields of study (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Haverland and Yanow 2012; Bevir 2010). We argue this is only partly helpful as it leaves the practice of QR tacit. Publications and courses usually remain silent on how to actually *do* QR, including attention to the situational logic of particular research practices within the context of specific research questions and settings. They mainly focus on the transmission of knowledge of distinct methods and some training in how to apply them. At the level of methodological teaching doctrine, although not necessarily always at the level of methods teaching, methods are seen as general, unvarying and of one piece; bits of knowledge that are uniformly applicable across a wide range of research situations,

leaving it unclear how to make such general principles specific to the situation at hand; how to improvise to make the methods fit the particulars of concrete situations (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009). The result is a rather one-sided and ineffective learning and teaching process.

The contribution of our article is that we take a practice approach to learning and teaching QR. To clarify how a practice approach helps us understand and enhance our ability to teach, and to learn to effectively engage in, QR, we especially draw on experiential learning approaches part of the wider family of practice theories (Kolb, 1984; Healey and Jenkins, 2000; DeLyser et al. 2013). Experiential learning is performative, indexical, reflective, and holistic, involving the whole person. The notion of experiential learning as holistic has developed into a strong commitment to personal involvement, personal responsibility for the learning process, and attention to emotion as an essential element of an effective and rewarding learning experience (Keen 1996; Humphreys 2006; Griffiths et al. 2005). Accordingly, we claim that teaching and learning the practice of QR hinges on learning to turn experiences of doubt and excitement into a dialogical process of asking creative questions, imagining new ideas, and animating a practical relationship to the world. Handling in an adequate way the emotional dimension of this process—both feelings of doubt, anxiety, and frustration associated with experiences of failure as feelings of excitement, creativity, and mastery associated with experiences of accomplishment—is conditional for its success.

The broader significance of our discussion of teaching and learning QR to the wider domain of the practice of researching social and political issues is twofold. First, it might seem that we are advocating an interpretivist approach to QR in contrast to the positivist approach that dominates the field. Indeed, that research is a practice is more readily apparent and acknowledged in interpretive QR due to its emphasis on reflexivity, improvisation and abduction (e.g., Hendriks 2007; Author 1 2012). However, in a practice approach, *all* research, even quantitative analysis, is a practice of experiential learning, of how to *do* it, including learning how to interpret surprising findings, use a repertoire of techniques to tinker with data, handle emotions and feelings of (in)competence, or present one's work to an audience of critical peers. While this view is widely accepted in accounts of the natural sciences in the sociology of

knowledge (see Hacking 1983; Pickering 1995), most positivist QR, but also a significant portion of interpretivist QR, is silent on its practice. There is a widespread tendency to favor a formulaic, textbook conception of QR, in which method application, neutrality and control are the privileged approach to truth, certainty and scientific authority (Hood 2006; Breuer and Schreier 2007; Author 2 2007). An experiential learning approach to methods teaching on the other hand compels us to confront the issue of how to convey the everyday activities that constitute good research practice.

Second, within a practice approach to QR, doing, learning and teaching research are continuous processes. Teaching QR is not just a necessary, obligatory element of the work of experienced researchers, but, more fundamentally, teaching and learning are homologous, reciprocal processes, as vital for students as teachers in mastering and perpetuating the craft of research. From the perspective of experienced researchers, learning to teach and teaching to learn are overlapping, continuous spheres within the practice of QR; a fluid participatory realm where "novices" and "masters" meet to jointly engage in addressing a range of practical challenges (Humphreys 2006; Noy 2015).

For example, when we, demonstrate how to code an interview as the first step in qualitative analysis (Charmaz 2006), more than once students react with bewilderment: "How did you do *that*?". We do not have a straightforward answer in such a situation. We usually tell a story, interlaced with biographical detail, how we went about doing this bit of coding, how we have gradually acquired this skill ourselves by learning from experienced researchers, and how we often have the same feelings as they have when we start coding—anxiety, doubt, frustration—but that we have learned over the years not to be too dismayed by these affects but to 'listen' to them for cues about the direction and quality of our coding. We also try to convey the excitement that is involved in the ever-deeper understanding of your data in a way that a mere reading of them will never achieve.

Hence, we contribute to a distinctive approach to QR that puts "emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than 'receiving' a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity and the world mutually constitute each other" and make each

other intelligible (Lave and Wenger 1991, 33; see also Nicolini, 2012, 172). In our practice approach of experiential learning, the history, practical situation, and feelings of both students and instructors—their experiences in other words—are key elements of the process of learning and teaching QR. This implies that the teaching situation, the classroom, is not a "passive container", but should be seen as a performative space in which students acquire the requisite skills by participating with instructors in the very activities that form the goal of the learning setting, or, as Noy (2015, 18) puts it, where "the teaching is inseparable from the taught."

In the next section, we further elaborate on the implications of practice and experiential learning theory for QR in general and teaching and learning in particular. We then describe three pedagogical practices—developing the research question, using heuristics, and engaging in the craft of research— that we developed through our experiences with teaching an intensive one-week course on interpretive and qualitative research to PhD students.

Experience, Affect and Dialogue in Practice Learning

For purposes of clarification we need to situate ourselves within the burgeoning field of practice theory. Practice theory is not a singular theory but a family of approaches rooted in different disciplinary and philosophical traditions and aimed at different objects of inquiry (Author 2 2003; Nicolini 2012). While attempting to summarize this theoretical diversity would be beyond the scope of this article, we would like to highlight three core ideas. First, the main unit of analysis is practice. Social phenomena are understood in terms of our being and doing in the world, i.e., the concrete, mundane activities through which we participate in social situations and that we recurrently enact to sustain and change a wider horizon of intelligibility. Second, practice implies an alternative conception of knowledge as what we learn by intervening in concrete situations and participating in its social and material texture (Hacking 1983). This usually sets in motion a chain of resistances that trigger within and between actors a search for accommodations and adaptations to social conventions and material constraints (Pickering 1995) Third, practice is not a stable 'thing' produced by cognitive efforts but is an emergent, dialogical, and embodied process of interacting with others,

emotions, materials, know-how, discourses, culture, power, and so on (Author 2 2012).

Our approach to practice originates in pragmatism (Dewey 1925; 1938; Follet 1924), which has given birth both to theories of experiential learning and practice theory (Kolb 1984; Lave and Wenger 1991; Author 2 2011b, 2012). In contrast to common conceptions, in pragmatist-inspired practice theory experience is not a private affective state but straddles the interface of private subjectivity and public language and action (Jay, 2005). Experience is relational in that it connects individual sensory, cognitive and affective states with the larger world by encompassing the latter into the former (Alexander, 1987 p. 63).

In this experiential practice approach, we learn when the world 'talks back' to our interventions (Pickering 1995; Author 2 2011b, 2012). We intervene because we find ourselves in what pragmatists such as Follett and Dewey called a 'situation', a breakdown of the conventional, the taken-for-granted, of the precarious equilibrium between actor and environment (Follett 1924; Burke 1994, 29). This triggers both engagement (the gradual mastery of the evaluative orientation that guides the practice) and surprise; a delicate mixture that, inevitably, invokes our cognitive and emotional sides (Yanow and Tsoukas 2009, 1344). Grappling with the world's backtalk often generates feelings of uneasiness, anxiety, unsettledness, or doubt, but also hopefulness and optimism at the prospect of enacting betterment. The 'teleo-affective complex' that is thus evoked (Schatzki, 1996) elicits an urge to do something about it (Locke et al. 2008, 909). We can either ignore or suppress this urge (e.g., hiding behind the rules or accepting "that's just the way it is"), or we can enter a learning process by temporarily putting our beliefs and habits in parentheses and actively engaging with the situation at hand.

Experiential learning theory has famously depicted this accommodation of the inevitable resistance of the environment to our interventions as a four stage, cyclical process of transformation. Experience is translated through reflection into concepts, which become guides for active experimentation and the generation of new experiences. Learning thus requires both the conceptual grasp or representation of experience and some transformation of that experience brought about by active

experimentation or intervention (Kolb 1984, 42; Healey and Jenkins 2000, 186). In this ongoing dual process we both immerse ourselves in the experience "using our senses and feelings in a concrete way" and think abstractly using logic and reason (Healey and Jenkins 2000, 187) Understanding and dealing with the affective correlates of our engagement is thus an integral element of such performative, situated learning (Author 2 2003).

Several psychological, emotional, and organizational reasons can make us hold back from the experiential learning process that practice has to offer. Once we have stumbled upon a situation that urges us to adapt our beliefs and activities, we often do not quite know what to do differently and how. The situation suggests but does not prescribe, and if we are inexperienced at our task such suggestions may be thin and hard to read. The essential conundrum of practice learning is that *it requires experience to acquire experience*. We need a minimum of embodied experience with the task at hand to act as a 'hook' on which to hang and integrate the new insights and experiences that we obtain in the learning process, or, more precisely, to be able to discern those new insights and experiences in the first place. Without such a minimum experiential base, what we get out of the learning process may be limited and lack meaning and depth. This is the familiar phenomenon of grasping something at an intellectual level without really "getting it". So, how to encourage learning from practice if people lack the (embodied) experience for engaging with the particular practice in the first place?

Even if we can tolerate "not knowing", we might still not see a way forward and learn from our experience. Especially since such experiential learning takes place within real world institutions that make it undesirable or unsafe to share doubts, struggles, and failures. They stimulate us to interpret, reorganize, and rationalize our embodied experiences in order to act and communicate, but this may mean that we transform our "raw experience" into an abstraction that is of limited use when confronted with yet another challenging situation. To save face, self-esteem, or career prospects, we feel compelled to suppress our feelings and hunches, and stick to existing procedures and vocabularies (Rein and White 1982; Author 2 2004). However, experiential learning theorists posit that transformative learning is enhanced when actors are stimulated to move outside their preferred learning style (Kolb 1984, 203).

The challenge of practice learning, thus, is to encourage novices to enter into what to them seems like a perilous learning process while its value and understanding only gradually and unpredictably emerge from the experience of doing it (De Carlo 2012; Noy 2015). The challenge for instructors is that they retain the sensitivity, openness and flexibility that allows them to recognize students' learning styles and gently nudge them to take different styles on board. However, institutionally, methodology courses are often habitually designed such that they favor one learning style (viz. active, reflective, or abstract), while on a personal level the instructor may feel most comfortable with one particular mode of teaching. Methodology course designs tend to emphasize theory and often insufficiently take students' prior experiences into account (for example, because these are deemed irrelevant to the subject matter of the course) or engage in skills training without the opportunity to reflect on students' experiences and emotions (Author 2 2003). In addition, instructors often ignore "how we all feel insecure and anxious when acquiring new skills" (Humphreys 2006, 174) and refrain from reflecting with students on the affective elements of the learning process and sharing their own emotions.

Practice learning is not painless. Exposure to unfamiliar teaching and learning processes may challenge novices' identity, confidence and self-worth (Wenger 1998), so much so that it can amount to a "learning shock" involving "acute frustration, confusion and anxiety" (Griffiths et al. 2005, 277). It entails identity costs (Taylor 2002), in the sense that it challenges the system of relations that sustain us, give meaning to what we do, and by which we define ourselves (Lave and Wenger 1991, 81). While some novice researchers might have a natural talent for doing an interview or coding and theorizing, those unfamiliar with such practices sometimes protect themselves from these identity costs of practice learning by closing themselves off to working through the emotional experiences triggered by the learning process (Weick 1989, 1). This process of closing off manifests itself as *resistance*. We see resistance not as a deliberate decision to impede the process of learning and teaching, but as an involuntary, and to the observer sometimes puzzling, emotional reaction to defend one's identity as a (novice) researcher against overwhelming doubt. And although they initially express themselves in the behavior of individual students, resistances form an inevitable and integral part

of the emerging, performative relationship between the student, instructor and other students in the class (Humphreys 2006). We interpret resistances therefore as important indicators of the state of the shared learning process (Sandler et. al. 1992, 118)[2], which, when not recognized and left unattended, may develop into an insurmountable barrier to learning. Students may leave the teaching situation discouraged, angry and even cynical about the potential of QR. Thus, we go on to show that engaging with resistances, as well as positive affects, is central to teaching and learning the practice of QR.

The Push and Pull of Learning and Teaching the Practice of Research

The situational background to this article is an intensive one-week course in qualitative and interpretive research to PhD students. We realize that this is not the optimal setting for the approach we profess. In the spirit of practice theory, teaching QR is ideally structured as an ongoing apprenticeship. This would allow the emergence of the kind of relationship between student and instructor in which processes of cooperation, connection, experimentation, reflection and trust can develop that constitute experiential learning. However, our course was nested within another common practice in international academia, that of the summer school. Students sign up for these brief courses, outside of term time, demarcated from the daily routine of teaching and working on their thesis, in a setting away from their own university, to receive, mostly, methodological training. We draw attention to this setting to emphasize our real-world constraints. Students do not arrive 'tabula rasa' but bring their particular histories of supervision and departmental culture with them, expecting to get advice about their projects during the course week, after which they return to their 'academic habitat' again.

Our week-long course was part of the ECPR Summer School in Methods which, at the time, took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The summer school mostly offered hard-core statistics and econometrics courses and the setting was suffused with the vocabulary that went with it. Ours was an exception in two ways: it was one of the few courses that offered training in QR and it was not focused on a specific skill, such as "introduction to generalized linear models" or "introduction to NVivo10" but on the comprehensive

process of designing and engaging in a QR project. The design of the course reflected two key features of experiential learning: method and theory are interwoven in the execution of a research project and engaging in skill-based learning is embedded in all aspects of the research process (Author 2011, 8-9; 241-242). In the practice of QR, we continuously tack back and forth between theory and method and between all phases of the research process. To see the phases of research as continuous and interdependent is, in our experience, one of the hardest things to convey to novice researchers (ibid.). The design of the course also reflected the two-pronged nature of experiential learning of moving back and forth between intervention and reflection on interventions (Kolb, 1984, 42). For example, the course alternated active engagement with practical task such as interviewing, class discussion to reflect on the students' experiences with this, and lectures on QR methodology. In the spirit of engaged learning the course was organized around the participants' own PhD projects, which they all presented to the group and discussed in individual sessions with the instructors.

Fifteen PhD students from ten different countries participated, studying topics as diverse as welfare reform in Mexico, identity formation of 'New Danes', collective memory in post-Soviet Georgia, and the role of women's organizations in peace building processes in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although all participants had designed a QR project, as we gathered from short project summaries submitted in advance of the course, and had indicated that they wanted to improve their skills in QR, we quickly became aware of moments of resistance to the teaching and learning process. For instance, while trying to introduce students to qualitative interviewing on the second day, we got bogged down in a methodological discussion about questions such as "Can you test a hypothesis with your research or not?" Initially, we were puzzled. The course brief was very clear about the course's goals, organization and pedagogical approach as an introduction into QR. Why then had they signed up for a course like this if they were hesitant, or sometimes even reluctant, to adopt its ideas and practices? But then we realized that the participants' reaction was, as is common to any intervention in practice, a form of "backtalk", the capacity that the agency of people and things has to unsettle our interventions (Schön and Rein 1994; Pickering 1995, 23; Yanow and Tsoukas 2009). In other words, from the start we were, as instructors, immersed in a good bit of experiential learning of our own. The course as a purposeful intervention in

the students' lives produced its own "backtalk". Taking an (auto-ethnographic) practice approach to our own situation, we asked ourselves: What kinds of resistances do the students present? What do they signify about the design of the course and the quality of our teaching? And how could we prompt a process of mutual inquiry to arrive at better solutions?

We realized that we asked a lot of the participants as we were unsettling their established ideas and practices of QR, and, as we argued above, that losing your established routines and beliefs can be anxiety-inducing. We therefore made it clear that we were there to help them develop research practices that we hoped they would find useful in range of situations. We also acknowledged that most participants appreciated this combination of challenge and accommodation. The course scored an average of 4 out of 5 in the overall assessment and generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm during the week. For example, after the first day, one participant said that she had already learned more over the past 24 hours than in the past few years.

Based on a log we kept during the course, as well as our joint reflections during and after the course, we used these experiences with doubt and excitement to further develop our approach to teaching and learning QR into three interrelated pedagogical practices, to which we turn now. We introduce each practice with an illustrative story of a course participant and explain what we experienced, how we dealt with the emergent resistances to, and achievements of, learning, and what the value of our approach is.

Developing the research question

Tamara[3] was in the third year of her research on the participation of so-called 'New Danes' (young citizens with a migrant background) in voluntary organizations. Even though she had already done 60 interviews, she could not convincingly explain to the group what she was trying to find out. She just could not get her research topic into focus. In her first assignment, she wrote that the topic was:

"The role of inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms in the negotiations of (national?) identity and perceptions of self among organizationally active young New Danes.

Or

The negotiations of (national?) identity and perceptions of self among organizationally active young New Danes and the inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms at play in these identity constructions."

The group discussion was unproductive and went in circles. We then asked Tamara what the real-world problem was that her research was about. [4] This question was driven by our observations in reading the pre-course assignments that the real-world context of the research was often unclear and the description focused almost exclusively on the theoretical literature. Tamara instantly became animated and explained how she had observed that the participation of New Danes in voluntary organizations affected the way they perceived themselves and their place in Danish society. Voluntary organizations were seen in Denmark as a favored way for immigrants to integrate in society, but in practice led to many different pathways and outcomes. The goal of the research therefore was to further flesh out how New Danes participate in various ways and what kind of participatory practices and mechanisms are at play. This sounded so clear and simple, that we just could not comprehend why formulating the research topic had seemed so difficult.

Tamara's initial research summary included many abstract concepts (identity, belonging, citizenship, inclusion/exclusion, empowerment). Rather than helping her to get the research into focus, they turned it into an overly complex and confusing jumble. But as soon as Tamara forgot about these theories and concepts for a moment and started to talk about the real-world problem she was interested in, things almost spontaneously fell into place. Nearly all participants started the course with a strong attachment to a particular theory, concept, or literature and demonstrated an impressive knowledge of these. But, whether it was role theory, strategic policy-making, or transnational advocacy coalitions, one of the effects was that the initial research

summaries were heavy with big abstract concepts. We do not downplay the importance of theory, of course. We all need ideas and concepts to be able to discern interesting issues in empirical reality in the first place (Charmaz 2006). But theory can, as in Tamara's case, obscure the actual topic and sustain a vague, unanswerable research question. Tamara, like many other beginning researchers, had spent a lot of time and effort mastering the representation aspect of the experience of engaging in a QR project, to the detriment of the operative aspect (Kolb 1984, 59). For learning to occur ideas need to be extended and grounded in the external world (Ibid., 52) Theory can kill curiosity.

Therefore, we helped the participants to develop their research question by moving in small steps from a broad interest to a researchable and relevant question (Booth et al. 1995) and articulating the real-world problem they were looking at (Author 2, pp. 247-248). Rather than coming at it from a theoretical lens or a 'gap in the literature' perspective, a real world problem or puzzle, a 'situation' in pragmatist terms, is an issue surrounded by significant complexity and uncertainty, value differences, or conflicting explanations, that has so far gone unresolved (Shapiro 2002, Author 2 2011, 244-248). The goal is to understand what people implicated in this situation do on their own terms, rather than from pre-conceived theories and assumptions. This generates new hunches and, eventually, explanations and conceptualizations of the research topic. In that way, the nature and relevance of theories follows from an abductive and grounded process of doubting, being surprised, inquiring, and being creative with initial assumptions and existing concepts (Charmaz 2006; Locke et al. 2008; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 28). The value of this pedagogic practice was reflected in the course evaluation, with participants appreciating "the awareness [arising from thinking] for yourself, before consulting and sticking to theories and literature too much.", "now, I know how I can think about the way I can underline the significance of my research question", and "how I can be much more creative".

However, persuading novice researchers to look beyond their theoretical preconceptions is harder than it may look. Usually they have some kind of image of the problem in mind and believe they have discovered this unique link to theories (and methods, although these are sometimes conveniently forgotten), which will become

their original contribution to what they consider to be 'the literature'. But, as Shapiro (2002) already highlighted,

> if a phenomenon is characterized as it is so as to vindicate a particular theory rather than to illuminate a problem that is specified independently of the theory, then it is unlikely that the specification will gain much purchase on what is actually going on in the world (593).

Novice researchers might nevertheless cling to theoretical preconceptions for a variety of reasons, such as having invested in a particular approach, trying to carve out an occupational niche, or, as we observed many times, because their supervisor is an adherent of a particular theory (Shapiro 2002, 597-598, 602-603). But perhaps the most powerful reason is that the novice researcher's early attempts at constructing theoretical explanations of data in their eyes look so inept and feeble in comparison to the finished theoretical products they encounter in the published literature. Bypassing the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of the empirical world means avoiding the associated embodied experiences of puzzlement and not knowing (Author 2 2012; Healey and Jenkins 2000). In this light, clinging to a preconceived theory serves the purpose of avoiding painful feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt that are generated by learning about their topic through their own experience.

Using heuristics

> A presentation on the fourth day gave us the impression that a safe, creative, and inquiring group dynamic had emerged. Samuel was halfway his Research Masters and was still unsure what to do. He had a big, yet fascinating question: why does democracy fail in Africa? While there is a considerable literature on this, he had identified a dominant explanation (the role of cultural and ethnic diversity). But he did not really know how to proceed from there. We agreed that it was a broad topic in which he risked getting lost. One of the main pieces of advice that emerged from the group discussion was not to be so fixated on democracy. He should not see it as a normative ideal or something static and fixed that can be achieved. What if it is not about democracy at all? Democracy is

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a strong Western concern, but how useful is it for how things should work in Africa? One of the participants even walked up to the white board to draw a quick map of a Western African region where she had worked for some time to explain that people living in some areas were not concerned with democracy or citizenship at all (but solely with their tribe and surviving).

Samuel's story is an example of how what Abbott (2004) calls "heuristics" can empower QRers to theorize themselves and gain a greater freedom to play with ideas, instead of anxiously holding on to established theories (Charmaz 2006). Heuristics are not methods. They do not have the algorithmic logic of methods that, when done according to the rules, result in assured (although not necessarily predictable) outcomes (Author 2, 2012). Heuristics are "strategies of discovery" or "tested ways of broadening what you are doing, ways to come up with new ideas, new methods, or new data, ways to get unstuck" (Abbott 2004, 112). Even the most seasoned QRer will get stuck when the world resists her research focus, interview questions, or favored theories. The story about Samuel's research shows several heuristics in action: 'stopping and putting in motion' (seeing democracy not as a static ideal but as a dynamic process), 'problematizing the obvious' (what if it is not about democracy at all?), and 'changing context' (is the Western concept of democracy appropriate to Africa; if so, is it in the fore- or the background in relation to tribe and survival?).

Heuristics thus achieve something different than a fixation on 'methods', which are often seen as the application of step-wise procedures for data collection and analysis that can be learned from written instructions and guarantee objective, valid, and replicable knowledge (Breuer and Schreier 2007). Even though unsettling and unexpected turns are inherent to social life, qualitative researchers are usually trained for rigorous and objective knowledge production rather than engaging in a practice of imagination, emotion, and improvisation (Abbott 2004; Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Author 2 2011a, ch. 9; Stone 2013). Methods are only partly helpful for the practice of research. While unquestionably important, if only to compel us to be systematic in what we do, methods should be seen as practical skills situated in, and informed by, a broader heuristic framework that embeds them in all other aspects of doing research and

enables the researcher to engage with the messiness of the world with an open mind (Author 2 2011a, 241-244).

We encouraged the participants to employ heuristics intuitively and dialogically. By asking each other a different type of question than "have you read this theory?" or "how did you select your case?", the students experienced how QR is a *social* practice and how they can benefit from its dispersed form of intelligence (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Heuristics spark a process of joint creativity by disrupting the taken-for-granted ideas and comforting categories that initially guide the formulation of the research problem and the design of the project. Heuristics are constitutive of a creatively productive, social research practice as they cater to a social learning process that should become second nature rather than an occasional exercise (Follet, 2013a, 24). They help (novice) researchers to refrain from defensive discussions ("that's not what my research is about"), saving them from the identity costs of not knowing or seeming lack of imagination, into creative encounters that expand mutual horizons (Follet, 2013b, 303).

The pull into the 'safe haven' of methods is quite common. While we had gradually been building up a safe, creative, and inquiring atmosphere in the group, some participants did not experience it that way. For example, on the last day, Jasmin suddenly withdrew from doing her presentation on the role of international organizations in the reconciliation process in Ruanda because she now "knew what to do" and did not think that "it would be good for her" to present. This again demonstrates how the feelings of insecurity and inadequacy that engaging in research practice generates are not just intellectual, but have an embodied quality that can at times become overwhelming. The dilemma of using heuristics is that the road to productivity is one of doubt and uncertainty. The practice of research can be ungainly and messy. Gratification lies in an uncertain and unpredictable future. It is downright challenging to become comfortable with this. A big part of our individual meetings with participants was therefore about reassuring them that feelings of confusion and vulnerability were normal, about providing care and a transactional space (De Carlo 2012). Using heuristics was key to our efforts to make doubt productive, reframing it from an indication of failure to an invitation to be imaginative and playful in engaging with the research topic, methods,

and data with others in a shared and reciprocal way, and start seeing these in a new light.

Engaging in the craft of research

During the fourth and fifth day, we practiced with coding (part of) an interview one of us had conducted. We briefly explained the goals and setting of the study from which the interview derived. Then, rather than explaining too much about how to code, we just let the participants try. Before looking at their findings, we first asked them about their experiences. Their responses were: "I didn't have a clue what to do", "I don't know enough about the context", "I got carried away reading it", "I got distracted by the [ad verbatim] way it was transcribed", "it takes time to get into", and "when is coding speculative?". We explained these were all good and common experiences and emphasized the centrality and that the exercise was set up to bring out the hard work of judgment and interpretation in analyzing qualitative data. Then we turned to comparing some of the codes they came up with for the first page. It appeared that they had difficulties with determining where an "information unit" started and stopped, with avoiding broad or theoretical codes, and with coming up with active codes that capture what is going on. Then we asked for two volunteers to compare their codes on the whiteboard. With the text projected in the middle, Tamara and José both wrote their codes on each side. When discussing their codes, we pointed out their strengths and similarities to emphasize that it is not all that random, that there is no one right solution, and that coding is a skill that can be learned.

It was important for the participants to have had the experience of not knowing what to do or how to make sense of the data. This might not be a pleasant experience, but it is necessary to recognize and overcome fears, to relinquish the sense of control over the situation (Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009, 1357), and accept the difficulty of doing this type of research work. Above all, it is important to do this jointly with others, including the instructors, who share the same experiences. Qualitative data analysis is at the heart of QR (Author 2 2011a, ch. 9), yet doing it well requires considerable experience. So where

do you begin as a novice researcher? We engaged in grounded theory analysis on the second and third day of the course simultaneously with practicing qualitative interviewing to demonstrate the intrinsic continuity between these two activities. Taking pains to demonstrate that we did not have the "one right answer", we did not do much more than point out just how many codes popped up in even a very small snippet of interview. We hoped to demonstrate in this way the richness of good interviews, what makes for good interviews, and that interviewing and coding are not clearly demarcated methods but elements of a holistic research practice. The participants had many intelligent observations and showed enthusiasm and appreciation of the subtleties of the craft of QR.

This craft can only be taught through and in practice (Breuer and Schreier 2007; Lave and Wenger 1991). It involves practical skills, judgment, and creativity that cannot be derived from textbooks. The best way for students to learn how to do it is by just doing it. The dilemma is of course that 'throwing them into the deep' triggers fear and uncertainty, which can become overwhelming and trigger a craving for hard-and-fast methods. However, qualitative interviewing and coding turn on heuristics, or practical strategies, rather than methods. Creating a research partnership with an interviewee, asking for concrete examples, asking yourself "what is this an instance of?" while coding, and coming up with active, evocative codes, are all practical strategies that create conditions for novelty, improvisation, and judgment (Weiss 1994; Charmaz 2006; Author 2 2011a, ch. 9). Knowing how to do all of this is a matter of practice, of interacting with the particulars of the situation at hand, of improvisation guided by earlier insights and ideas, of recognizing and acknowledging the feelings this generates, and gradually accumulating a sense of what it means to do so in competent and productive ways.

Conclusion

The practice of QR comes down to engaging in experiential, dialogical and holistic learning processes. Learning to do QR is more than acquiring knowledge of different methodologies and skill in applying certain methods. It is a social, embodied, and situated performance that requires a period of apprenticeship in which the novice

learns to advance from an initial topic to a feasible research question, practices interviewing and observing people situated in particular contexts, tries to make sense of empirical data and relate them to the extant literature, and learns how to formulate compelling arguments. Such practice learning requires practical judgment, sociability, imagination, being in touch with one's feelings, and a tolerance for critique and setbacks—in a word, it involves the whole person.

However, QR methods courses often do not provide the psychological awareness and organizational support to engage in this experientially challenging learning process, and may result in defensive, unproductive reactions in novice researchers, and arguably senior researchers alike, limiting the quality of their research. Based on an a practice approach of experiential learning, we have explicated how teaching and learning QR comes down to working through embodied experiences of doubt, discontent, and unsettledness to foster feelings of animation, excitement, and creativeness. As such, we provide an alternative to the above-mentioned tendency in the extant literature and pedagogical practice to mainly focus on raising methodological awareness. We do not claim to have invented a completely new perspective on teaching and learning QR, though, but, much in the spirit of practice theory, bring out what many experienced QRers intuitively do in their research and teaching. In doing so, we especially affirm and extend experiential approaches (Kolb, 1984; Keen 1996; Humphreys 2006; De Leyser et al. 2013; Noy 2015) with a firm theoretical grounding and set of pedagogical practices.

During our course we employed a number of pedagogical practices, three of which we presented here. Derived from experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984; Healey and Jenkins, 2000; DeLyser et. al, 2013) these practices offer a sophisticated and integrated program of philosophical principles, a reflexive attitude, and practical assignments for teaching and learning the practice of QR. Yet, we are aware that what we can achieve in a one-week intensive training course is necessarily limited, particularly as practice learning relies so much on continued active engagement with the issue at hand and upon prior experience as fertile ground for embodied insights. After the course, we wondered what would happen once students returned to the familiar "academic habitat" (Haverland & Yanow 2012) of their institute or department. Learning the practice of QR is a slow process of accretion, with occasional breakthroughs of mastery

and insight, that takes months or even years of intensive teaching and practice. Supervision and mentoring, capstone projects, writing workshops, and collaborative research projects are all welcome media for fostering such an ongoing apprenticeship.

We therefore conclude by encouraging QRers to engage widely in learning and teaching the practice of QR and more regularly and openly share their experiences with other course designs, practice approaches, pedagogical practices, and resistances and achievements (see Keen 1996; Hood 2006; Humphreys 2006; De Leyser et al. 2013; and Noy 2015 for good examples). This in itself may be met with doubt and resistances, but we believe it will also generate excitement and enhance the productivity of QR.

Notes

[1] We contend that experienced researchers are also familiar with these feelings. What distinguishes experienced researchers from novices is their ability to make doubt generative; to interpret doubt as a signal of being confronted with an interesting practical and intellectual challenge and convert it into a productive intervention. However, an important problem with the current managerialist academic context is that the reigning vocabulary is one of control, of the research process, of one's results, of one's research environment, and of one's personal career, with the result that doubt is not regarded as a potentially valuable component of the research process.

[2] Although we are inspired by the psychoanalytic concept of resistance, our interpretation deviates considerably from the traditional clinical, patient-centred concept.

[3] Names of participants have been changed for privacy reasons.

[4] The idea is from Deborah Stone (personal communication).

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