



Synergistic Pedagogies in Virtual Spaces: Preparing Social Justice Educational Researchers Through SoTL

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COVID 19 thrust higher education faculty into reimagining teaching and learning in virtual and online settings. In this context, we ask how faculty can learn to build virtual educational spaces focused on social justice and equity and explore what the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) holds for building critical pedagogical approaches to virtual education. As university faculty members who teach qualitative research methods to educators within two different Schools of Education at public institutions, we seek to prepare early career educational researchers and help them understand how research can inform and

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advance their practice. SoTL research helps us to maximize our pedagogical approach to teaching research methods in ways that promote greater social justice and equity even within the online classroom. Specifically, we seek to find the synergies that exist between the skills needed by qualitative researchers in general and the skills needed by those routinely using SOTL projects. Facilitating those synergies has the potential to advance both teaching practices and helping to grow and enhance the overall body of knowledge educators rely on to refine and improve their work (Larsson et al., 2020).

Online educational research methods courses are designed to prepare educators to conduct and use research often focused on their own teaching practices. Educational spaces, both in higher education and K12 education, represent key opportunities to model equitable teaching practices and imbue criticality. For example, these courses can help students to construct research questions that center and prioritize creating emancipatory learning spaces. Further, these courses can help students to create socially conscious professional development plans while strengthening their sense of social justice. Finally, the work they do in the course can contribute to theory and knowledge creation. As such, these courses are important spaces to explore how to design socially just and equitable learning spaces.

In this chapter, we argue that educational research has long been tainted with colonial, hierarchical overtones that have been resisted and transformed by feminists such as bell Hooks (1994) and critical race scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2014). Ladson-Billings and hooks have encouraged counter storytelling and non-verbal arts-based research practices as ways to highlight narratives from populations that are usually muted or silenced. We draw from critical theorist scholars to craft a pedagogy that is culturally adaptive, attentive to vulnerable students and is deliberately reflexive. Culturally adaptive research methods have an emphasis on developing or climbing the empathy wall (Hochschild, 2018), learning through critical questioning and pedagogical discomfort, learning to be comfortable with ambiguity and learning to listen deeply to acknowledge without judgement, beliefs that may not be synchronous with one's own. We present the teaching of empathy, critical questioning, and ambiguity as important qualitative research stances and practices that can engage with the vulnerabilities faced by people while also interrogating power structures that give rise to inequities. We also describe and explain our online teaching pedagogies related to these courses, the role

of SoTL in the curriculum, and share specific activities for teaching qualitative research online that will encourage reflexivity, empathy and critical questioning. Shulman (2011) pointed out that the problems of teaching and learning cannot find a final cure or solution; instead as the world evolves and changes, new challenges of practice appear in teaching and learning that call for innovative solutions.

VIRTUAL EDUCATION IN A (POST) COVID WORLD

Some of the challenges of 2020 in higher education teaching and learning are centralized around the COVID-19 pandemic that has served to highlight the inequalities of contexts between groups of students and brought to the attention of higher education faculty the critical need for social justice pedagogies that can interrogate racism and classism as a key element in innovation. Virtual platforms have been adopted around the world during the pandemic so that a majority of teaching both at the K12 and university levels are taking place online. Different platforms are being widely used and the question of when to use synchronous or asynchronous teaching online has been given serious thought. Faculty in higher education have tried at times to come up with a solution that can simultaneously meet the challenges all students face such as the hyflex approach that calls for an adaptable pedagogy in terms of how students can access coursework and participate in class meetings. Higher education faculty have been similarly challenged to be able to design learning experiences for students that are meaningful in the online environment.

Teaching qualitative research to novice scholars who are also in education and preparing to be educators means that they need to understand and use qualitative research to improve upon and learn from their own teaching experiences. For many higher education students, the online platforms were not new, what was new was the degree to which they were compelled to use them consistently, making it all the more important to pay attention to questions of equity as they manifest in the online platforms. It is becoming clear that online learning is here to stay in one form or another and even after COVID-19, so it is likely that the flexibility offered by online learning will be sought after by many students in higher education as they juggle life and jobs with their academic pursuits.

Life in lockdown and shutdowns have challenged educators and students alike resulting in experimentation with different virtual platforms and strategies to keep students engaged in learning while navigating life

issues simultaneously. Alongside the shutdown, incidents of racism like the George Floyd murder have brought national and worldwide attention to racial injustices leading to protests and demands for change that go beyond lip service. Actionable items are sought in business, law and in higher education. Universities are in a unique space to be able to respond to these calls as they navigate teaching in the virtual environment with a social justice impetus.

RESEARCH METHODS COURSES IN EDUCATION

Research methods courses in undergraduate and graduate education are often oriented towards quantitative content, which comes with a history of colonization and a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and researched. The historical beginnings of qualitative research similarly led scholars to respond to the colonial aspect over time (feminists, scholars of color, anti-racist research approaches) by emphasizing decolonizing research, by paying particular attention to populations marginalized in research, learning to listen and learn from and not merely about participants, and in particular by trying to bring to the forefront non-verbal methodologies (arts based) that can elicit stories from vulnerable populations. Behari-Leak (2020) points out that decolonized, socially just, research is needed to “constantly challenge ourselves to unlearn, relearn, and reframe assumptions and practice” (p. 2). As faculty in higher education it has been important to us to continuously learn about democratic educational spaces and in particular to create virtual spaces for students that are democratic (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2011) and are inclusive of multiple student voices (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2012).

Researchers have to learn to engage in reflexivity related to race, class, and gender, and interrogate their personal belief systems which can be different from those of participants they encounter in a research setting. As higher education faculty who have been teaching research methods for twenty plus years and have taught research methods online for a number of years, we see this moment as an opportunity to teach and engage with pedagogies that will nurture and train emerging scholars in research methodologies. While the pedagogies for teaching qualitative research methods are still being developed, holistic pedagogical approaches (Mulvihill et al., 2015; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018), critical approaches to questions (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017) and life writing methods (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2017) as well as arts

based approaches (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020) contribute towards deepening our understanding of shifts in consciousness and ways of coping with traumatic events that are increasingly global in nature as they permeate our lives in different ways. The impact of these events led to an urgency in terms of teaching research methodologies online in ways to bring a nuanced understanding of such differences in a struggle for a more just world.

PURPOSE OF THE CHAPTER

Qualitative research can examine the complex reasons and emotional motivations for people's choices that may indicate worldviews different from one's own. We offer culturally adaptive methodologies that use empathy, critical questioning and ambiguity as strategies to engage with participants. Examples from three case studies are used to help outline a methodology aimed at finding the deeper story underlying vastly different life experiences. Further, we offer activities to teach empathy, critical questioning, and tolerance of ambiguity to emergent scholars and researchers.

Our aim is to examine and adapt qualitative methodologies to craft a pedagogy of the political to meet the ever-changing current world events. Methodologies that have examined vulnerable populations' experiences have their foundation in indigenous and decolonizing methods (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013), culturally relevant approaches, cross cultural research, and the pedagogical discussions of Ladson-Billings (2014) and Paris (2012). Culturally responsive methodologies are attentive to vulnerable populations and questions of power in research. As a way to move towards a culturally adaptive methodology that is simultaneously critical in terms of questioning power while at the same time being sensitive to vulnerable populations, we advocate for the use of culturally responsive methodologies as a bridge. In this process, taking our cue from Ladson-Billings (2014) who outlined a culturally relevant *pedagogy 2.0* aka the re-mix, we refer to *culturally adaptive methodologies* or methodologies that are flexible and capable of mashups as well as amalgamate different ways of approaching research topics that are currently relevant, political, and individual. Turning a qualitative lens onto research questions that have triggered vastly different responses, questions that are political as well as educational, and questions that require us to gain a deeper understanding of motivations driving different actions is part of the work. As a contested

field, education has stakeholders taking sides in terms of the best way to educate and provide an environment for learning. We are interested in examining what types of methodologies will help us understand world-views that may be vastly different from that of the researcher. We seek to understand the ethical implications of crossing divides, learning to be empathetic and trying to understand actions that might not be what the researcher chooses. We hope that this understanding will provide additional insight into how these questions and stances help situate the SoTL alongside qualitative research methodologies and pedagogies and create synergy within a virtual environment.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

What is needed is a culturally responsive methodology that embraces empathy, ambiguity, and critical questioning. Qualitative research can delve into the complex reasons for the choices people make, the emotional motivations behind their choices that may indicate worldviews different from one's own. Recent political events in the world such as the experiences of COVID 19 and the different responses across the world and within the United States, the murders of George Floyd and the aftermath as a groundswell of a movement for social justice, and the controversies surrounding the election in the United States make it clear that there is much to be understood that cannot be ascertained by predictable parameters. Further, divisions run deep, causing emotional schisms and a communicative impasse, which require researchers who are adept at methods that are adaptable and equipped with skills that are able to cross ideological lines and bridge communicative divides. Within educational settings, these skills are needed to conduct research to understand security on higher education campuses and K-12 schools, conflict studies, and other aspects of educational research where education is seen as a contested site for several world views to compete. For qualitative researchers, this is an opportunity to use culture as a lens through which to understand the complexity of the human experience. To do this research, a culturally responsive methodology focuses on:

- (a) examining how to prepare novice researchers to use sensitive, culturally adaptive approaches to research in online environments where researching culture, differences, and diversity is not easy;

- (b) exploring the meaning of critical questioning and ambiguity in research processes;
- (c) exploring the pedagogical strategies and frameworks for researching different worldviews; and
- (d) learning how to climb the “empathy wall” (Hochschild, 2018) to open communication channels with people on different sides of an issue.

Theoretical conceptualizations of culture are numerous across multiple disciplines. This chapter frames culturally responsive methodologies to include methodologies that are adaptive to the political. In order to explicate culturally adaptive methodologies as a methodological construct, we draw on conceptualizations of culture, communication, empathy, and reflexivity from various disciplines such as sociological (Hall, 1992; Hochschild, 2018), anthropological (Crawford et al., 2015), political science (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2010), and education (Alim & Paris, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). Hall (1992) categorized culture in three ways: *culture as community*, *culture as conversation*, and *culture as code*. The essentialist idea of culture as a fixed concept has long been replaced with post-modern fluid notions of culture and multiple meanings generated by the term. In education, for example, Ladson-Billings (2014) and Paris (2012) discussed and adapted culturally relevant pedagogies to move away from an essentialist perspective to include culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies that had a more fluid definition of culture and that centralized social justice and equity principles. The *methodology of the political* that we construct in this chapter aligns with and is a product of our theoretical framework as it draws on culturally adaptive methods including constructs of empathy, ambiguity, and critical questioning.

USING CASE STUDIES IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

Valverde-Berrocoso et al. (2020) examined the literature pertaining to online environments to identify the key themes arising from research about education in virtual spaces (Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020). They discovered three primary focus areas of research, namely, e-learning and online students, e-learning and online teachers, and finally e-learning and online curriculum. While the case study method was one of the more popular and prevalent research methods for studies about online spaces,

we have used the case study research methods and case study pedagogies as teaching tools. Specifically, case study methodologies have been advantageous for designing learning within online environments where an emphasis on SoTL can assist with delving deeper into analysis of social justice projects. Considering cases, for example, as pedagogical tools for students in primarily synchronous online spaces to engage in structured role play. These experiential exercises within online spaces helps students practice what it means to conduct research cross-culturally. Synchronous online spaces such as Zoom give students multiple tools to use simultaneously to engage, reflect, log questions, have ‘back-channel’ dialogue in chats while the ‘main stage’ role play is underway. In the process, novice researchers learn to be aware of the fallacy of regarding culture as simply ‘other.’ Learning to take into account differences in worldviews and what that might mean in terms of power within research settings is fundamental to understanding the process of the movement of power in research settings.

Case studies for teaching in online synchronous spaces not only allows for such explorations and deep analysis, but also holds the capacity to document the learning via video, transcripts, and chat dialogue for further and continuous reflection. Creating multimodal data that can be further analyzed fulfills pedagogical goals related to preparing social justice researchers. Case studies in the online synchronous environment can work well especially if drawn from experiential interviews contributed by students. Involving them in the creation of the case as well as the deeper analysis elevates their engagement and readiness for synergies that emerge. This use of case studies as pedagogical tools for building research capacity building in novice researchers is made stronger through the lens of SoTL. Further, it was our aim to create a community in synchronous online spaces by encouraging teaching, social, and cognitive presence (Valverde-Berrococo et al., 2020) from all participants as they learned what it meant to become a qualitative researcher through nurturing empathy, critical questioning, and reflexivity. The next section explores how case studies can serve as catalysts within SoTL projects.

Case Studies Catalyzing SoTL Projects

Scholars have pointed out that SoTL researchers need flexibility in their research methodologies since they are often from a wide range of disciplines (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Case studies can be used as flexible

tools for methodological and pedagogical purposes for SoTL projects. Further, we applied the principles of good practice in SoTL (Felten, 2013) by focusing on student learning while engaging in methodological and pedagogical inquiry in partnership with students. Drawing from three case studies that we used when teaching research methods courses the multiple purposes they served will be explicated. Methodologically they were meant to help students deepen their understanding of what it means to use a culturally responsive methodology focused on critical questioning skills and to bring into sharp relief the pedagogical benefits of continuous engagement with a SoTL project. The merging of these purposes allowed for new experimental forms of case studies to develop.

The cases were initiated from an assignment specifically designed to trouble the status quo and to bring forward any latent understanding students held about the “other” in order to make space for further interrogation. Students were required to conduct an introductory interview foregrounding culturally responsive methodological concerns. Webb (2015) points out that the interview is a valuable tool for SoTL research projects. The interview is a dynamic exchange of ideas that leads to a shared experience between the interviewer and participant. Further, the power of the researcher versus the participant calls into question the interview as a purely empowering experience. As faculty who conduct SoTL research projects, we are aware of our multiple roles as part of the institution of higher education, as the faculty teaching and as the interviewer in our research role. In order to learn from our own teaching, we designed projects that would lead students to deliberate and carefully think about the assumption of a shared understanding in interview research. In order to foreground the importance of empathy, critical questioning, and reflexivity in our research methods pedagogy of research, required the creation of assignments that created a juxtaposition of world views. The assignment called for a deliberate selection of participants whose worldview was different from that of the emerging scholar. The three cases were selected because of the discussions that followed, the lessons learned, and the contribution of the cases towards a deeper understanding of what it means to engage in culturally responsive methodologies. All three cases highlighted the importance of engaging in working the empathy wall (Hochschild, 2018), getting at the deeper story (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2018) through a process of learning to be comfortable with ambiguity and practices political listening (Cramer, 2016) that includes a critical questioning stance. The three cases serving as exemplars include

Case 1: interviewing an adult graduate on retrospective memories of his special education classroom experiences, *Case 2:* interviewing a counselor at a school which had an alternative school-within-a-school; and *Case 3:* interviewing a parent on their experiences of homeschooling their children. These case studies set the stage for students to analyze and discuss the economic, social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of their work in virtual settings, and to raise questions about social justice imperatives. The details of the cases, and lessons learned from each, are given below. We also share how our analysis of these cases in relation to the extant literature helped us to arrive at a series of propositions about the relationship between the tenets of SoTL and the how teaching online qualitative research methods courses serve learning objectives related to social justice and equity.

Case Study 1: Retrospective Memories of Special Education

In our classroom discussions of the interviews students conducted, some moments stood out as especially significant for learning several lessons about culturally responsive methodologies and garnered lengthy, stimulating discussions among students. One of these cases was an interview with an adult graduate of a special education program at a high school. The student had graduated and was now holding a job at a local grocery store. The student who had conducted the interview had done so because of her strong belief in the failure of special education programs and a conviction that special education classrooms were particularly harsh environments for students combined with very little if any learning. This was the student-researcher's starting assumption. In order to prepare for the interview, the student practiced reflexivity by outlining her own positionality with regard to the interview. She admitted that her preconceived ideas regarding the appropriateness of special education came from her experience observing a cousin who had been through special education programming and had learned very little, did not graduate from high school and has continued to struggle with life and with work. The student wrote a pre-interview journal that outlined her preconceived ideas. Further, she checked the interview protocol against any leading questions, asking questions that might lead to monosyllabic answers like yes/no and to ensure that questions were open-ended and elicited stories that might be positive or negative.

The preparation allowed the student to complete the interview after which she had to contend with her own emotions. Contrary to her

expectations, the graduate of the special education program had very good memories of his classroom experiences and his teachers. Post interview debriefing facilitated by online asynchronous discussion forums and supplemented by synchronous Zoom discussions revealed the difficulty and emotional stress on the interviewer who found the task of listening without argument or contradicting what she heard hard. The experience allowed for a vigorous debate among members of the class and questions arose as to how to listen in ways that muted one's own assumptions in order to allow and actively encourage the other to be heard. Despite good intentions and preparation, the case taught us that it is entirely possible for researcher values to dominate. Advocating for a social justice perspective, the case lessons included the value of a political listening. Political listening in our view is a culturally adaptive listening that requires one's own voice to be quiet to enable an acknowledgement of the perspective that is different from one's own.

Case Study 2: Seeking the Deeper Story

Examples from *Case Study 2* taught lessons of the difficulty of getting at the deeper story when the participant and the researcher have assumptions that generate mistrust. The case raised ethical issues regarding full disclosure; what type of disclosure is appropriate, and when should it occur and under what circumstances does alignment with social justice aims, combined with the principle of beneficence (research for the benefit of a group of people), indicate a necessity for non-disclosure? These types of provocative questions prompt debates about how researchers determine the appropriateness of covert (or partially covert) studies. In this case, the student chose to interview a high school guidance counselor at his own high school in which he had been a student. As an alumnus, he gained access to visit his teachers and explore the school-within-a-school that he had, in his years as a student, barely been aware of. The school-within-a-school was an alternative education program that comprised students who were struggling academically in the main school or were labeled with behavior difficulties. These students, placed at risk by a variety of factors that they often did not have control over, were moved to the program that was housed in the basement of the school. School-within-a-school programs exist in most states and often have different schedules, academic curricula, and include behavior modification programs. The student became aware of places within his own school that served as a different environment for students whom he rarely saw. The questions of

what that site might mean for students, and how sites might help one see and experience differently, the extent to which borders existed between one and the other and how the different sites gave rise to different experiences fueled his inquiry (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2019). Asking to have a conversation with the guidance counselor had been consented to because of his alumni status. The student prepared for what he anticipated to be a somewhat hostile conversation. In preparation for the conversation, the student examined his questions, decided to memorize them rather than write them down, while keeping one set handy to give to the counselor should that be needed. Further, the student had questions that given his social justice stance had much to do with the students in the school-within-a-school, how they were counseled into the program and whether they were counseled into higher education. The conversation was granted after the student revealed he was an alumnus of the school. The case became interesting to all the students during the student's presentation and was chosen as one among the three that would serve as a case for further study and investigation. The interview proved to be difficult from the start with distrust on both sides. The guidance counselor was unwilling to talk during the interview about the process of his job and his decision making regarding how he counseled students. The interviewer distrusted the counselor's social justice stance and tried to find stories that would get at issues of equity or justice or lack thereof. The student interviewer did not wish to disclose his own stance regarding social justice while the participant was unwilling to tell the stories that might have shown the complexity of his role. The student did not gain the trust of the counselor and as a result got a stilted interview conversation. Further, as an alumnus, he was approached by several students in the school halls who remembered him as a star basketball player and were eager to tell him stories about the school and the school-within-a-school. The data that he gathered did not arrive in the form he anticipated. Rather, the data turned out to be the reactions his participant had within the interview environment (not direct and full answers to the prepared interview questions), but also the data came from the school context where students' informal conversations in the hall further informed his analysis. This data was unanticipated yet turned out to be quite meaningful as an indicator of the school environment. The students in the research methods class raised important questions about the ethics of obtaining data through casual conversations and wondered what and whom they could trust when entering the field. Further, as a social justice advocate, what was the step

one needed to take in the field that would further equity? The students asked ethical questions: whether it was ethical to mask one's advocate stance to allow the other to speak; whether it was ethical to have an agenda for change at the outset that involved persuading the other to change their minds. The critical questioning stance therefore was taken by the students in the classroom who were wondering whose word could be trusted and what ethical issues all this raised. The post interview discussions took place in the virtual environment synchronously via zoom and asynchronously via discussion boards.

Case Study 3: Striving for Empathy

Examples from *Case Study 3* brought to the forefront the challenges of building trust and empathy when one's own belief systems are sharply in contrast with those of participants. Case study 3 involved a student who wanted to interview a woman who homeschooled her children. Home-schooling was perceived by this student to be practiced by people who are unwilling to send their children to public school due to their religious beliefs or perceived ideas about public schools. The student who wanted to interview a parent who homeschooled their child, prepared for her interview by practicing reflexivity and writing down and acknowledging her own assumptions regarding home schooling. During the interview, she learned about the different ways in which women juggle different roles, a variety of subjects and topics and how they figure out pedagogies that can engage their children. She found that listening deeply allowed her to put aside her own beliefs while building the empathy wall. Since she was herself a mother, she drew on that commonality to scale the empathy wall. She also found that the participant held equally strong views and assumptions about public schools as she herself did about homeschooling. This extended to paying taxes that funded schools that the children did not attend, and to the right or appropriate texts for inclusion in curricula, as well as the conflicts that make public schools potentially dangerous places. As a qualitative researcher looking to take on a stance of empathy, the interviewer found herself trying to find ways to hold conversations where false beliefs and assumptions could be dispelled through a slow building of trust. But is it the job of the researcher to dispel faulty assumptions? The key was to listen and talk without the intention to prove or drive home a point. But what does the researcher do in the face of what they believe to be falsehoods? What if the researcher starts to experience a shift in their own understanding based on the ideas being asserted

by the participant? What does the researcher need to do in order to practice a culturally responsive approach to this research encounter? The students in the research methods class chose this as the third case study for further discussion about these types of questions and the dilemmas it raises. They were interested in learning more about researchers' ability to empathize but also critically question. In other words, how can they learn to be in reflexive conversation with themselves and other researchers when practicing culturally responsive research methodologies, can include experiencing high degrees of ambiguity and uncertainty? If listening means being open to other beliefs and cultures, it can also mean researchers may find themselves increasing their malleability as they are impacted by the experience of the research process.

APPLYING A CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY TO CASE STUDY METHODS

From these three cases, more in-depth pedagogical learning was realized by applying the tenets of SoTL. We examined the implementation of these cases in our research methods course in the context of teaching online qualitative research methods with a focus on social justice and equity in education. Specifically, we learned five key things. First, culturally responsive research methodologies can be taught via online qualitative research courses that combine elements of synchronous and asynchronous learning. The case study assignment, in particular, provided students with alternative frameworks and lenses through which they could effectively understand the layers of analysis that are required when asking research questions related to social justice and equity within the context of education. Furthermore, the importance of the interactive nature of the learning that occurs when case studies are built and debriefed within online research methods courses was reinforced. The students were engaged with the central critical questions of research practice where the backgrounds and experiences of participants' multiple identities and cultures are taken into account and acknowledged within the inquiry process to allow for a co-creation of knowledge between researchers and participants.

Second, we learned that culturally responsive qualitative research can incorporate decolonizing methodologies by rejecting a single epistemology. The case study pedagogy quickened the learning around this

point as the students were immersed in various ways of navigating simultaneous multiple realities. By rejecting a single epistemology and looking for a solidarity-based epistemology (Bulbeck, 1998), students can lead to what Santos (2017) referred to as “ecologies of knowledges.” All three cases demonstrated the importance and significance of multiple epistemologies.

Third, we learned how to include culturally responsive methodologies that include a methodology of the political should begin with working at the ‘empathy wall.’ An empathy wall is “an obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different views or those whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances” (Hochschild, 2018, p. 10). The use of the case study assignment demonstrated in entirely different ways the powerful role that resentment (Cramer, 2016) can play in dialogues of social justice and the challenge of building the empathy wall by moving into view the tacit understandings held by students usually concealed in typical online course structures.

Fourth, we learned that culturally responsive qualitative research can be taught to students by intentional focus on various reflexivity exercises designed to pull up and make visible researcher values. The case study assignment used reflexivity as the center point to help guide all individual and group examination of the critical questions raised by each case. Paying attention to the values that animate their lifeworld can also help researchers see how to examine the subtle life worlds of their participants. The three cases demonstrated the ways in which researchers’ emotions and assumptions need continuous examination and to be considered part of the data set under analysis.

Finally, we learned that a methodology of the political requires researchers to be aware of their moral and ethical boundaries (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Culturally responsive pedagogies for qualitative research led us to examine our personal epistemologies and how they influenced our teaching so that in turn, we could teach students to reflect on and examine their own personal epistemologies. How personal epistemologies influence methodological decisions including design is a growing area of interest (Singh & Walwyn, 2017).

ADDITIONAL APPLICATIONS

To further demonstrate the outcomes of our SoTL inspired project we offer some student exercises for research courses that developed after further reflecting on what we learned from our most recent use of the case study assignment. These exercises can be used to help guide students as they are learning to employ culturally responsive thinking within research projects focused on social justice. Specifically, these exercises are for research projects where students encounter a clear dissonance, such as when the researcher does not share the values of the individual or the group whom she studies. Engaging in culturally responsive methodologies requires us to ask how to teach empathy and more crucially, how to build rapport when empathy does not derive naturally in the field. Second, these exercises can help researchers anticipate the decisions they will have to make in order to study populations and power circles during the course of field work. These guided reflexivity assignments should be implemented in a synchronous online environment.

EXERCISE 1: REFLEXIVITY

Goal: Practice reflexivity (think about why I think the way I do).

Guidelines

Divide the class into groups of four. Two students should take the role of interviewer and interviewee while a third student should take notes and the fourth observes the interactions. Choose debate topics that have at least two clear sides to an issue (e.g., all K-12 schools should require uniforms, K-12 schools should ban sites like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram on their computers, school funding should be equal across districts, homework should be banned, higher education should be free; affirmative action in college admissions is the best policy; legacy admissions should be banned; universities should serve as sanctuaries for undocumented students; college fraternities and sororities should be abolished). Each group of students should pick one debate topic and take sides. The interviewee should take a position while the interviewer should take the opposite position. The others should take on neutral roles and observe and take notes of the conversation.

The interviewer should prepare 3 questions for the interview. The interview should proceed for no more than 10 minutes.

Reflection

The group should write a short note about the process and their own thoughts in response to the following prompts:

1. Did you take the position you naturally believe in or the opposite?
2. How did taking the position make you feel?
3. How well did you listen to what was being asked/said?
4. What parts made you uncomfortable or angry or have any other strong emotion?
5. Why do you think you felt the emotion at those points?
6. What assumptions or prior beliefs did you uncover about yourself during or after the interview.

EXERCISE 2: CRITICAL QUESTIONING

Goal: Learn to critically question what we take for granted.

Guidelines

Pick a favorite show that you watch regularly. Watch one episode of the show with the following questions in mind.

1. Does the show reveal any stereotypes (race, class, gender, disability).
2. Does the show position any person as an 'outsider.' What characteristics does that person have?
3. What (or who) is missing from the show?
4. Think of 2 reasons why you like the show.
5. Think of 2 reasons to critique the show.
6. How did watching the show through a critical lens make you feel?

EXERCISE 3: BUILDING AN EMPATHY WALL

Goal: Learn to build trust and practice empathy.

Guidelines

Divide the class into groups of four. Let each person take turns being asked questions by the others. Ask one question each in round robin fashion. The questions can be about challenges, motivations, goals and aspirations. In a virtual environment, this exercise can be adapted for synchronous or asynchronous discussions. For example, most virtual platforms allow groups to be formed. Questions can be posted by group members for each student by a set day of the week with responses to be posted a day later as reply posts to the questioner.

Reflect

- (a) What did you learn about asking questions?
- (b) What did you learn about the people in your group?
- (c) To what extent did this exercise help build trust?
- (d) What else could you have done to build trust?
- (e) To what extent did you get a sense of the person's life?

OR

Think of a person at your workplace or in your circle of friends who holds a completely different job from you. Make a list of 10 questions you would like to ask her to know more about her/him and her/his job.

Reflect

Share within the group. Discuss why you would like to get to know this person and what your questions might reveal about any assumptions you might have.

CONCLUSION

It is becoming increasingly important for qualitative researchers today to learn to cross boundaries and face incongruent belief systems in their journey as researchers exploring the human condition. Incongruent belief systems can surface between the researcher and those they are engaged with during the research process, including those they observe and/or interview. These incongruencies are rarely addressed when preparing early career researchers and can be sites for important questions related to social

justice whether the researcher considers themselves to be an insider or outsider to the subculture under examination. Faculty who teach online qualitative research methods courses need to be able to help early career researchers build the capacity to recognize and explore these dynamics within an online environment. To do that, faculty must work on building their own empathy and learn to question what they think they know about their students. Online environments will require faculty to create new innovations for opening channels of communication among students especially when approaching complex discussions related to social justice and equity. The preparation of graduate students requires pedagogical decisions that emphasize the teaching of critical questioning and reflection along with the skills and knowledge needed for qualitative research. In addition, the pedagogies need to go beyond teaching empathy and listening and focus on teaching students to become more aware of their personal epistemologies, note the gaps between their understanding and their participants' understanding of their worlds. In this sense, the pedagogical decisions made by faculty teaching qualitative research courses to students need to incorporate different sets of exercises that help students navigate various belief systems and navigate a methodology of the political through cultural adaptation. In order to engage in these advanced pedagogies, faculty can benefit directly from incorporating SoTL projects into their own professional development plans for continuous improvement. These efforts help navigate the multiple methodological decisions that researchers will need to make in order to create greater empathy while exploring the critical questions related to social justice and equity within educational spaces.

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