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Keywords
Graduate student, Qualitative research, Authentic learning, Student engagement, Instructor engagement, Mentoring

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Abstract

This case study explores the lived experiences of two graduate students and two university instructors in a course-based qualitative research project. The course design was a research methods course that focused on qualitative research and analysis and provided a vehicle for the instructors to reflect on their experiences and the students' experience of the cognitive and affective demands implicit in the assigned tasks. Findings indicate that development of student research skills is enhanced through student engagement in a real-world research project. This authentic learning experience, although stressful and overwhelming within the timelines of the course schedule, was instrumental in assisting the students to believe they could move forward with greater independence as researchers.

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Introduction

The pedagogy around teaching in higher learning is often debated. While some instructors continue to lecture, others have begun to look for alternative methods. Students in the MSc graduate program in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies (KHS), University of Regina, are offered a research methods course that focuses on qualitative research and analysis: Ethnographic Methods in Research KHS 802. Originally, this course was intended to provide students with an overview of ethnographic methods and skills (Hoeber & LeDrew, 2008). Students were expected to conduct some small ethnographic exercises, such as an observation and an interview. These exercises were usually not connected to a real research project.

The authors of this research project contributed equally to the preparation of this article. The students' names have been listed first alphabetically followed by the instructors' names.

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Qualitative research within KHS at the University of Regina is a relatively new phenomenon. The dominant faculty teaching and research discourse has been historically predicated on natural science and/or positivistic research. And although students were succeeding in the class outlined above, they seemed to lack direction moving on in their graduate work. They did not seem to be as prepared to conduct and analyze their study as their quantitative colleagues who had more time to develop a knowledge base in research methods.

The instructors of KHS 802 felt it was time to try something new. Many theorists argue there is added value in offering students authentic learning activities, "experiences that reflect real-world ways of knowing and doing" (Bennett, Harper, & Hedberg, 2001, p.73). It is believed that these activities afford students the opportunity to transfer knowledge obtained in formal education to practice. Larena Hoeber and June LeDrew, the instructors of KHS 802, altered the course design to revolve around a complex scenario where the students would become immersed in the activity (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003). This type of authentic experience requires complete commitment throughout the entire course; the benefits of the experiences can then be used across a spectrum of disciplines (Herrington et al., 2003).

Bransford, Vye, Kinzer and Risko (1990) propose that authentic activities should have a single complex problem that is to be explored by the students and all activities should be related to that problem. In such a circumstance students have the opportunity to recognize their own questions and explore solutions. The instructors redesigned the course to offer an opportunity like this.

The project was not only an opportunity for the students to have an authentic learning experience, but also to work with the instructors as they learned more about conducting research. Mullen (2000) suggests that instructors need to associate live performances of research to their pedagogy and to share the discoveries made by graduate students in partnership with themselves. This interaction between students and instructors may shift a more traditional, hierarchical instructor-student relationship to one in which students are mentored.

Tenenbaum, Crosby and Gliner (2001) found that graduate students who received mentoring from their advisors in the form of instrumental and networking help (e.g., publications, posters, and conference talks) were more productive in terms of conducting their own research. Graduate students who received psychosocial help (e.g., role modeling, empathizing, and counseling) were more likely to be satisfied with their mentor and general graduate school experience.

The purpose of this paper is to present the voices of the students and instructors to describe their experiences in a real-life, course-based graduate research project.

Methods

Data Collection and Analysis

After completion of the semester in which the new course design was implemented and obtaining clarification, with the University's Research Ethics Board, on the ethics of using one's own data (which did not require formal ethics approval), data were collected for this case study. Course documents (e.g., syllabus, class notes, conference poster and paper presentation notes) and student and instructor journals were analyzed. In particular, data

related to the research project's influence on participants guided our chronology and selection of the case study's themes, reflections and strategies for course project evolution.

The Participants

The participants in this case study included two of the three students enrolled in KHS 802 during the 2008 winter semester and the two instructors of the course. Of the three students involved in the course, two remain in the graduate program and continue to reflect on their experiences in the class. Although the third student participated in two knowledge translation activities associated with this course project (i.e., poster presentation of the project results completed during the course and conference presentation on the influence of the project experience on their graduate studies experience), she withdrew from graduate studies after completion of this class due to employment obligations and did not have the time to participate in the preparation of this manuscript. Her data was not used in this project.

June LeDrew is a Professor in the Faculty of KHS. She has been employed at the University of Regina for 21 years. Her research and teaching interests include issues and challenges in children's health and elementary teacher education. June and Larena Hoeber created KHS 802 in 2002 and she has taught it independently and together with Larena during this time. Larena is an Associate Professor in the Faculty. Her primary teaching duties are in the discipline of sport management. Her research is focused on organizational culture and socio-cultural aspects of amateur sport organizations. She uses qualitative research methods to frame her research.

Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous is currently working on her Masters in KHS in the area of sport and recreation management with a focus in recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. When enrolled in this course, she was in the second semester of her program. Cathy Mills recently completed her MSc in the Faculty of KHS. At the time of the course she was in the second semester of her Masters program. Her research interest is youth sport, which Cathy began researching during her undergraduate Honours thesis.

Our Story

The story about our experiences with the course research project is presented chronologically as we collectively recalled it, transitioning between the voices of the students and instructors.

All relatively new to graduate studies, the students walked into the first day of KHS 802 both nervous and excited. They did not know what to expect, but assumed it would be similar to other courses: they would receive a syllabus outlining what they would be learning, readings that they would use throughout the semester, and three or four activities from which the instructors would test their learning. They soon learned that the instructors had different plans for the class.

In past semesters the instructors had been unsure whether students were maximizing their learning through the course. They wondered if there was a better way to approach the course and the key learning objectives. Based on their dissatisfaction with previous courses, the instructors revamped the course to offer more student flexibility on course assignments including a 'research project' option. It was the instructors' intention that this option would increase student engagement through authentic learning and help them prepare for their own qualitative research projects.

> Research Project: As a class, we will conduct a qualitative research project. The project will involve designing the qualitative research project, submitting an application to research ethics, collecting data (primarily using interviews), analyzing data, and writing a research manuscript for submission to a journal. (Hoeber & LeDrew, 2008)

As the syllabus was presented, there were two course choices: 1) written exercises based on observations, one interview and a final paper, or 2) complete a real research project integrating the students' and instructors' research interests. The decision to do the project option was not easy. Although it sounded interesting and valuable, we had to be aware of the tight timelines and reality of completing a project in only four months. As a student reflected:

> I remember feeling a little uneasy about the decision. I knew it would be good, but it would be a lot of work in a short amount of time. I put high expectations on myself and was concerned about the large group component of this option. I think it was difficult for the students to openly discuss our feelings about the assignment as we didn't know each other well yet and didn't want to let the instructors down. (Student Journal)

One instructor also shared some of those same concerns:

> Having undertaken my own research projects, I knew how rewarding the process was, but also how difficult it is to 'schedule' a qualitative project. There are some challenges and roadblocks. I was worried the project would not go smoothly and would result in the students being frustrated with the project, instead of gaining valuable, first-hand experience. (Instructor Journal)

Although the decision to complete the project was not finalized until the following week, the students were already standing in line for a roller coaster of challenges, accomplishments, and emotions. It was apparent the students were anxious about the project, but were also excited about the possibilities. The instructors were particularly energized as they felt the potential for learning from the project choice was great.

> The other instructor and I were pleased that all three students were interested in choosing the research project option because we felt it might make a difference down the road. Truthfully I think the previous assignments used, while beneficial, probably were not as easily retrievable from their long-term memories as the more hands-on, time-sensitive, and intense research project they agreed to. (Instructor Journal)

The importance of keeping journals was stressed in this class. The journals became a way to collect our thoughts, work through new ideas and challenges, and document what we were thinking and feeling throughout the semester. As with every research project there are a number of steps that occur. These steps, although commonplace for the instructors, were new and sometimes intimidating and/or overwhelming for the students. For example, developing the abstract and submitting an ethics application required time and thought, and produced anxiety for the students as they went through these for the first time. These challenges began with deciding on a topic that would accommodate student choice and interests. The instructors wanted to identify a project that would engage everyone involved. Given the four-month course duration limitations, deadline awareness and other stresses

were bound to be out of the ordinary for the students so it was important for them to have an interest in the research topic. One instructor offered a suggestion to help collect the group's thoughts:

> When a project gets overwhelming for me I try to break it down to the essentials graphically. Coming up with a common research project that included the interests of the three students was easy enough; a Venn diagram revealed the intersecting areas of interest(s). My graphic drawing abilities might have to change if the class size were to increase beyond three. (Instructor Journal)

The research project topic, agreed upon during the first class, was determined by integrating the three students' general areas of research interest. The students had interests and experiences in the following areas: children's physical activity, older adults' physical activity and administration of community programs. Hence the research question that was agreed upon was: Do community-based program administrators purposefully develop and deliver programs differently for children and older adults? The students developed a set of guiding questions and interviewed six local community program administrators for the project.

After a research topic was determined, a plan of action, including setting goals, needed to be developed. As a class we discussed various avenues to disseminate research findings; although a manuscript was listed in the syllabus, this was not the only option discussed. For the students, deciding on the avenue for dissemination gave some focus to the project.

> First things first – or last things first as it turned out…Where would we disseminate our results? What was our goal? Originally we discussed publishing a paper (which is still in the plans). One of the students was involved in the Graduate Students Research Conference at the University of Regina and thought a poster at this conference (which is held at the end of the winter semester) might give us a solid and definite focus. From this we built our timeline which, by our calculations, meant we should have started a month ago! (Students' conference presentation notes, May 2008)

> We thought it important to support the graduate student conference on campus and believed it would be a positive first experience for some of the students to get their work into the public domain. Having that early, positive first experience helped to increase the likelihood the students would not find the dissemination of knowledge unattainable and will try to repeat it. (Instructor Journal)

The scheduled timeline became an integral part of the success of the class. Keeping the goal in mind and documenting all of the steps to accomplish the goal was important. After the first class and until about halfway through the semester June and Larena maintained a textual flow chart, which was emailed to all class members. Everyone's duties and the order of them were listed. And while the project was the students', the instructors picked up some of the tasks because of the very tight turnaround timelines. For example, one instructor was actively involved in making final revisions to the conference poster in order to ensure it was completed in time for the conference:

> I'm a desktop publishing person and visual fuss-budget. When it came to providing revision suggestions for the students' poster for the graduate student conference it was easier and more timely being close to the end to make the revisions myself and send them back via email than to type out what I thought should be revised and

> hope the students were able to understand what I thought was needed and know how to make the edits. The printer's due date for the poster drove my involvement. (Instructor Journal)

Throughout the project the students had to tackle tasks that they were not always familiar with, jumping in and figuring it out as they went. The abstract was one of these tasks. Although the students had read abstracts before, they had very little, if any, experience in how to write one. This became even more complicated as the research question was still evolving. One of the students who had presented at a couple of conferences before this class decided to take on the task of writing something up. The abstract started out as an overwhelming and daunting task, amplified by the fact that this was not just her own project – she was writing about something that all three students would be following through with. The process of working through the abstract proved to be a benefit in itself as one student reflected:

> Writing the abstract helped me to get a handle on the project. I was very overwhelmed by the project to begin with. Somehow writing the abstract helped me to simplify it. (Students' conference presentation notes, May 2008)

The next task was submitting an ethics application. To the instructors, ethics applications have become part of regular operations, but to the students it was far from a routine task. An instructor reflected on her perspective:

> I guess I've grown used to the subtle power dynamics and politics that a qualitative researcher can encounter in a research community that provides preference for quantitative paradigms. However, you work the system to move your research agenda forward. So after the students had done their groundwork and organized their research project's framework I was surprised by the trepidation they had about getting the project approved by the University's research ethics board. It was almost as if they thought their reviewers wore cloaks and hoods and were out to scuttle their project. (Instructor Journal)

Although the instructors forewarned the students that ethics applications did not often come back with full approval and assured them that concerns could often be dealt with a quick exchange of emails, the task seemed scary to them. The instructors, possibly without knowing or intending, have become "used to dealing with critical academics who feel that they need to ask questions or pick apart pieces – whether warranted or not" (Instructor Journal). But for the students who had not yet worked through the process the fear and intimidation was real:

> My initial reaction after volunteering to do the ethics application was WHAT HAVE I DONE!!!! This task was foreign to me as I had not previously even seen an ethics application. I am thankful that I have experienced this part of the roller coaster loop now as opposed to in 6 months when I am filling my own out after I propose my Masters project. (Students' conference presentation notes, May 2008)

Once all of the groundwork was complete and ethics approval received it was time to collect the data. In previous iterations of this course students interviewed each other and provided feedback on what they did well or what they could improve on. Although there is often some anxiety in interviewing peers, it is a more controlled environment with minimal consequences if things do not go as planned. This time they were conducting real

interviews, with real people, collecting real data. In real interviews students felt more accountable for their interviewing skills. The credibility of the project was on their minds.

> The first thing I should do is calm down and review the articles that we have read on interviewing. Secondly similar to most of the new things I have been experiencing I can seek guidance from the Instructors. This will help to ensure that I do not get sick when I am hanging up-side-down in my roller coaster seat at the top of the loop! (Students' conference presentation notes, May 2008)

Although the situation seemed intimidating at first, in the end the students seem to have gained valuable skills and confidence from the experience. The pressure of interviewing someone they did not know in relation to a project that would affect not just the interviewer but also other students, created an authentic, or perhaps forced, learning environment. The results were very positive as one student noted:

> We were reminded of the reasons why we choose the class project option in this step of the project. Instead of interviewing our friends the interviews were attached to a real project. This gave us real anxiety: Am I leading the questions? Am I probing for answers that I want to hear? Are we missing any questions? Do I know the questions well enough? This gave us real excitement as the project was coming together; we were getting real answers, and understanding what a real interview feels like. (Students' conference presentation notes, May 2008)

With data collected and transcribed it was time to analyze. The students quickly learned the challenges of completing qualitative research in a group. These were amplified by the fact that the students were all relatively new to research and lacked confidence in qualitative data analysis. One student reflected on the challenge:

> Doing qualitative research in a group is almost impossible...a hard process...it was pretty hard analyzing the data as a group. You are getting three different perspectives and you are trying to mesh them all into one set of findings. (Student Journal)

The three students involved completed two interviews each that varied in length between 20 minutes and one hour. Each student transcribed her own interviews, creating six documents. This resulted in a situation where the transcripts were "all formatted slightly different – all covering similar, yet different information" (Student Journal). The students met with the challenge of not only learning to analyze qualitative data but doing it in a group and in a brief time.

Throughout the course, readings associated with the various aspects of qualitative research (e.g., ethical issues in qualitative research, conducting interviews, transcribing) were assigned. At times the schedule of readings aligned with the project timing; however this was not always the case as one student noted in regard to data analysis:

> Another problem we were faced with came from our crunched timeline. We ended up having to analyze our data before we learned how. What is a code, theme, category? What classifies as a similarity and difference? (Student Journal)

As new researchers, finding the 'right' results was a concern. There was a fear of making a mistake or being 'wrong'. The instructors reminded the students to document the process,

justifying how the data were organized and interpreted. However, this can be easier said than done, especially in a group as one instructor reflected:

> I do not typically analyze qualitative data with more than one other person, as I know how difficult it is to 'see' the data in the same way as another person. So I was worried how the students would feel about this part of the process and how they would proceed with it. (Instructor Journal)

The instructors were able to guide the analysis by suggesting the students divide the data into simple categories of similarities and differences in how the community program administrators developed programs for children and older adults. As the students completed the analysis the poster began to take shape. With the conference quickly approaching the students began to see the finish line, cross it and then sit back and realize how much they had accomplished.

What Did We Learn: Students' Reflections on the Project

Challenges

Analyses of student journals and student conference notes reveal that the students experienced similar challenges at certain steps of the research project. Numerous journal entries show that students felt overwhelmed with, and anxious about, almost every step of the research process. One student noted:

> We were all approaching the class at different places in our studies, or in our experience with conducting research. I remember thinking at the beginning of the semester this was too much to take on. The project is too big – there is too much to learn. To work around different people's schedules and conduct an entire project all in one four-month semester was very overwhelming. (Student Reflection)

In addition they commented on the tight timeline associated with completing a project in a four-month course and the difficulties experienced when learning to analyze data for the first time in a group setting.

Benefits

Although the students felt the pressure from meeting timelines and working collaboratively in a group, and had moments of great anxiety, they agreed that the experience of completing a qualitative research project from start to finish led to increased confidence and knowledge. The instructors also noticed the change in the students' confidence and research abilities.

> There is no longer a fear of a project failing; rather there is an understanding that something can be learned from every project (whether it is the outcome or the process). (Student Reflection)

> A year later I think the students have benefited from the project because they saw how one project and the energy devoted to it can be shared dependent on the lens through which you, and the selected audience, are viewing it. (Instructor Reflection)

Additionally the experience was found to be beneficial because it was authentic and it enabled the students to learn how to do research in a comfortable setting where they could be mentored and learn from each other.

> The class project provided me with the opportunity to not only learn how to do qualitative research but to actually do it. Because the project was real I had no choice but to apply the information we were learning in class…. It provided me with experiences that I will no doubt one day face. I believe it was less intimidating to be experiencing these processes right now as opposed to in the future when I am trying to complete ethics, develop interview questions, find participants, complete interviews, and analyze data for my own project. This project provided me with a foundation to build on. It is always less intimidating to ride a rollercoaster when you have someone in the seat next to you screaming their heads off too! (Student Journal)

> Although all of us have high standards coupled with various idiosyncrasies as we work on projects, we had to relent on some of these because of the project's tight timelines. It was a shock to the students when they received their 3 x 4 foot poster for the conference, which turned out to be purple instead of the blue colour scheme they approved on the printer's proof. But this is just one of the real-world challenges that happen when doing research that the students had to experience. (Instructor Journal)

> What was it about KHS 802 that was so effective, was it the instructors, the readings, the journaling, or the class project? I believe it was a combination of all these factors. The instructors were there to share their experiences and knowledge with us. They shared experiences from when they were grad students…. They also shared their knowledge of qualitative research with us and their experiences with it. (Student Journal)

A final benefit noted by one of the students extends past learning how to do qualitative research: she felt that participating in the project assisted her in transitioning from undergraduate studies to graduate studies.

> At Christmas time I contemplated coming back to school. I was confused, lacked confidence and felt like I did not know what was going on…. The other day I ran into a fellow grad student who was just like me at Christmas – lost at sea surrounded by fog with a storm fast approaching. She asked me how I got to the place I am at right now. Upon reflection I found my way in part through this class. KHS 802 threw me a lifeline that I so drastically needed to guide me to shore. (Student Journal)

What Did We Learn: Instructors' Reflections on the Project

The initial delivery of this course with the aforementioned project began in January 2008 with the presentation of the students' research poster in April (Cummings-Vickaryous, Fisher & Mills, 2008). Admittedly, we, the instructors, were going "by the seat of our pants" (Instructor Journal) the first time the course included a start-to-finish real-world research project since we had no notion of what types of student responses we would receive throughout the project. In 2010 we began the second delivery of the course with a similar assignment, but this time with one instructor and four students. We have more clarity on

how the research project may evolve and should be evaluated after working with the students on this project in 2008.

We read academic literature about student engagement but we believe this project, if the instructor can stay on top of it, has great potential for "instructor engagement" since it mirrors our real-world academic employment environment. Sharing with the students the steps involved in getting a research project to the knowledge dissemination stage can both enlighten and invigorate an instructor who may struggle with the boredom of standard course presentation. Overseeing students preparing and presenting yet again "fake" assignments that will be "shrink-wrapped to the shelf" (Instructor Journal) can dull the sense of engagement. Also it appears it has assisted the students to work more independently on their thesis or other projects after having had an, albeit intense, experience with all stages of this research project.

Although this course-based assignment is still in its infancy, we offer several recommendations for other instructors who may be considering this type of course-based qualitative research project and the revised research project information from our most recent course outline (Figure 1).

#1 – Find a knowledge dissemination vehicle that has a quick turn-around time for the research project's presentation.
A local, regional or virtual conference presentation provides a concrete due date for submission of conference proposals and preparation of conference presentations. The graduate student conference the students presented their project at in 2008 was in early-April with a call for abstracts due in late January. There was no conference registration fee and the course instructors paid for the poster printing (approximately $150) through their professional expense accounts. This year the graduate student conference is in mid-March and hence this knowledge dissemination vehicle was impractical. In 2010 we have selected a virtual conference presentation at one of the 23 international conferences that are available annually hosted by Common Ground Publishing (http://www.commongroundpublishing.com/). In this case the Dean of our Faculty graciously offered to pay the virtual conference registration fee for each student group ($US200). Other funding opportunities to support graduate student research dissemination may be available at your institution.

#2 – Before beginning the course, review your class enrollment and group students into manageable project numbers by sub-discipline or interest area and personality types.
This year there are four students enrolled in the course: two have an interest in women's studies and two have an interest in coaching theory and elite sport. With their approval and the support of their graduate student supervisors, the groups were assigned and research project purposes were determined before the first class. From these project purposes, the students began crafting a 150-200 word conference proposal, which they brought to the first class. As the instructors, we were also the gatekeepers for the recruitment of several interview participants for the projects, which saved the students' time. Once secured the students must continue the work by making contact with research participants, introducing themselves and arranging interview times.

The maximum number of students in a graduate course in our Faculty is currently 10 students. We do think this would equate to a manageable number of student projects (five groups of two or four groups consisting of two and three).

#3 – Select a data collection method that will provide data for the research question but can be accomplished within a reasonable timeframe for course delivery (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observation, documentary).
We believe that extensive fieldwork, observation and/or multiple data collection methods would be difficult to conduct in a course spanning four months. In the case of both the 2008 and 2010 projects, semi-structured interviews were/will be the data collection method with a range of three to six participants. With these data collection methods in mind, instructors need to carefully mentor students in the scope of research questions that can be asked.

#4 – Have a lecture and/or discussion(s) with the students on "power" in the context of carrying out any research project coupled with the other duties of a faculty member (e.g., teaching, research and public service).
During the 2008 delivery of the course, we found we were frequently sharing our experiences with the students on the "politics and pressures" (Instructor Journal) we have experienced trying to move our personal research projects forward, particularly in a historically quantitatively-based discipline. Discussions about the 'hierarchy of value' respecting differing avenues of knowledge dissemination and 'how to play the game' occurred but were not overt in the course outline. We frequently reminded the students that although the 'process' of doing research can be rewarding and is important (knowledge for knowledge's sake), the 'product' of the research is what potential academic employers look for on a curriculum vitae. This awareness is important for anyone interested in pursuing a career in academia. Therefore, using examples from our lived experiences we had discussions on matters such as referencing the project's conference presentation and career progression. This experience assisted us in amicably determining authorship order on this paper (i.e., students' names listed before instructors' names).

#5 – Set timelines for duties (with names, tasks and dates) to keep everyone on track; be flexible and revise frequently.
We found this was especially important early on in the project. After every class we sent out an email recounting our discussions, setting out who was doing what and by when, and noting who was backing them up for support. This helped to keep the students focused on their individual tasks. However, flexibility is needed if it looks like the project may be derailed by circumstances. For example, if major changes are required to an ethics application, an instructor may need to take the lead to address the requested changes in order to expedite the ethics approval process.

#6 – Although it is the students' research project, due to the tight timelines sometimes the instructor may have to be actively involved with the project and help out with tasks.
As suggested earlier, in 2008 we found in a few instances that it was easier, less stressful on everyone and time efficient if we picked up certain tasks along the way. This might take one hour of our time (e.g., because we were familiar with the software program, had helpful contacts or were the gatekeepers to potential participants, etc.) but the student would have had to spend far more time and energy learning through the process when they could be completing another task with a timeline. To illustrate, learning how to use the desktop publishing software for the conference poster was time consuming and towards the end we made the revisions needed ourselves rather than trying to verbally describe a visual change that needed to be made.

#7 – Use micro-activities in class for textual (thematic) analysis before having the students analyze entire interviews.

Even after reading several articles on thematic and data analysis and having in-class discussions, analyzing the text from the six interviews that the 2008 class collected was a conceptual stumbling block for most of the students. It is recommended the instructor present analyzing exercises such as "word sorts" to give students hands on experience in coding/categorizing text. Using an unfamiliar field of knowledge can be helpful here. For example, we have used a "rock" sort (i.e., names of rocks on cue cards) as an inductive reasoning activity. The students group the rocks according to how the groups make sense to them. They then have to title the group and explain how the word sort was accomplished. By contrast, we have used picture advertisements for a deductive reasoning activity. The students group the pictures according to the category title we provide (a.k.a. theory), explain the process they went through to group the pictures and explain why the picture fits into the category. We also have them explain why some pictures were left out of the sorting (negative case analysis). These simple word or picture sort activities, at a fundamental level, can assist students in seeing the larger thematic analysis picture.

Figure 1. KHS 802 Course Outline (LeDrew, 2010)

The research project – Total Course Value 70%

In groups (assigned by general area of interest), you will complete a qualitative research project. The project will involve designing the project and completion of the following:

- Submission and acceptance of an conference proposal (a.k.a. abstract) - 10%
- Submission and approval of an ethics application - 10%
- Data collection (e.g., interviews, focus group, observation, etc.) - 10%
- Thematic data analysis - 10%
- Conference presentation (YouTube Video or Powerpoint) - 10%
- Manuscript publication or other knowledge translation activity - 10%
- Collegial reviews and support of other group projects – 10%

Venue: The suggested venue for your 2010 project is the Common Ground cluster of conferences (http://www.commongroundpublishing.com/), specifically the 2010 International Conference on Sport and Society. The 2010 Conference will be held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada from 8-10 March 2010. Students will submit a proposal for a 'Virtual Presentation'. Please see the Call for Papers at http://sportandsociety.com/conference-2010/call-for-papers/

Fees: One presenter in each project group is required to register for the conference and pay the conference fee of $US200.00. The Faculty of KHS has graciously offered to cover this expense for 2010. Other expenses for project completion must be covered by the student (e.g., tokens of thanks for project participants, printing, video costs, local travel, etc.).

Due Dates: While the conference suggested has due dates for various submissions and the Instructor has due dates for course grades, it is acknowledged that there can be extenuating circumstances in life that cause delays. For example, if a student group would like to revise a manuscript and resubmit after the course ends, a grade of *Incomplete (INC)* can be assessed with an amended course completion date or the Instructor can submit a *Change of Grade Form* with an assessed or revised grade at a later date. However, it is in everyone's best interest if a project does not continue indefinitely. Hence, there will be a 1-year time limit on submission of Change of Grade Forms for 2010 class projects – December 31, 2010.

Authorship: The topic of authorship is addressed in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2009, pp. 18-19*) and will be reviewed in class. While one of the

roles of the Instructor, or other assisting Faculty member, is to guide the student's research development to the traditional point of manuscript publication, or other knowledge translation activity, there is a fine line between guiding and the need to be credited as a contributing author on student projects. Open discussion is expected and agreements should be concluded on this issue before any project's knowledge dissemination stage is completed.

Final Thoughts

Barrows (n.d.) describes 10 essential characteristics of generic problem-based learning:

1. Students must have the responsibility for their own learning.
2. The problem simulations used in problem-based learning must be ill-structured and allow for free inquiry.
3. Learning should be integrated from a wide range of disciplines or subjects.
4. Collaboration is essential.
5. What students learn during their self-directed learning must be applied back to the problem with reanalysis and resolution.
6. A closing analysis of what has been learned from work with the problem and a discussion of what concepts and principles have been learned is essential.
7. Self and peer assessment should be carried out at the completion of each problem and at the end of every curricular unit.
8. The activities carried out in problem-based learning must be those valued in the real world.
9. Student examinations must measure student progress towards the goals of problem-based learning.
10. Problem-based learning must be the pedagogical base in the curriculum and not part of a didactic curriculum.

Without having the essential characteristics of problem-based learning at hand, the instructors intuitively knew several years ago that KHS 802 had to change to be more meaningful for the graduate students. It is apparent the 2010 revised course design satisfies most, if not all, the characteristics presented by Barrows. Time, project successes, or not, and student experiences will be the tell-tale.

The transition from undergraduate studies to graduate studies can be a difficult process as can learning how to actually do qualitative research. Instructors of research courses can benefit from sharing experiences of success and failure. Although not drawing any generalizations about how trustworthy these findings on student experience are for other contexts, findings from this project demonstrated that providing an authentic activity such as a research project in a safe, supportive environment offered these students a valued learning experience. The students appreciated the opportunity to experience a project from start to finish and commented that it led to increased confidence and knowledge. Being mentored in a structured and safe environment provided the students with the opportunity to learn from each other and from the instructors.

However, instructors need to be aware that with each new step introduced in the research process the students may experience feelings of uncertainty and being overwhelmed. This coupled with students' feelings of frustration, trying to accommodate tight project timelines and working in groups with colleagues they may, or may not, be familiar with can be challenging. Instructors can assist their students through these feelings by increasing

mentoring efforts and sharing real-life stories about their own research experiences, of which not all may be comfortable, cozy nor without criticism. This manuscript, outlining our authentic learning experience, contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a firsthand account of a course-based research project. The project was instrumental in assisting the students to believe they could move forward with greater independence as researchers and provided a vehicle for the instructors to reflect on the students' experience of the cognitive and affective demands implicit in the tasks we assign. Future inquiries could further explore additional methods or practices that assist graduate students in learning how to 'do' qualitative research within a course-based setting.

> 'Come to the edge', he said. They said, 'We are afraid.'
> 'Come to the edge', he said. They came. He pushed them... and they flew.
> (Guillaume Apollinaire, 1880-1918)

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