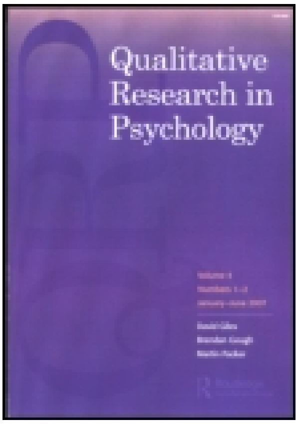

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Teaching Qualitative Methods Using a Research Team Approach: Publishing Grounded Theory Projects with Your Class

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Teaching Qualitative Methods Using a Research Team Approach: Publishing Grounded Theory Projects with Your Class

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This article is a guide for developing a qualitative methods course in psychology that organizes students into a research team conducting a joint project toward the goal of publishing a paper in an academic journal. This class structure allows for students to consider qualitative methods and epistemologies through a process of engaged learning. Tips on creating a research team environment, planning a survey component of the course, guiding students through a grounded theory analysis, and organizing the students toward writing a manuscript are presented. Issues raised for consideration also can be useful when supervising individual students' grounded theory projects.

Keywords: grounded theory; publishing; qualitative methods; research supervision; teaching

The focus of this article is to provide a guide for teaching a graduate-level qualitative research methods class in psychology. Although students learn about a variety of research methods each week via lectures and small exercises, the course being described is distinguished by an overarching structure in which students are organized into a research team and collaborate on a research project that moves from study conceptualization, through interviewing and analysis, to the writing of a manuscript. The research project is based on grounded theory method, although the class structure enables students to use the data collected as the basis for smaller exercises using other methods as well. This structure has a basis in experiential learning, teaches students to work together in a team, and provides them the opportunity to publish a co-authored study. Although the course has been designed for psychology students, its structure can be adapted so that it is relevant to other fields. Common challenges that arise in teaching this type of course and ways to overcome them will be discussed.

Increasing Demand for Qualitative Research Instruction in Psychology

Qualitative methods of inquiry often are utilized to examine complex subjective experiences in psychology. These methods appear particularly suitable to studying these

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experiences because they allow research findings to be interpreted inductively from a data set without the constraining effects of a deductive process that uses predefined variables and hypotheses—often necessitating the simplification of a complex process (Haverkamp & Young 2007).

Qualitative research is gaining acceptance both as a way of supplementing quantitative research and as a credible form of inquiry on its own (Patton 1990). Over the past three decades, methodological pluralism and the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches in research have been advocated in the field of psychology (e.g., Howard 1983; Ponterotto 2005), and the growth of qualitative research has been evidenced by the increased number of published works in psychology (see Rennie, Watson & Monteiro 2002).

Also, national granting organizations have become interested in funding qualitative research, which has led to an increased interest in these methods. For instance, the National Institute of Mental Health has focused on the role of qualitative work in studying mental disorders as a main research conference theme (e.g., 1992; The Sixth Annual NIMH International Research Conference on Primary Care Mental Health Research: Concepts, Methods, and Obstacles) and has offered qualitative methods presentations as part of its Annual Training Institute program (2008). This growing interest in qualitative work has been seen as reflecting a shift toward a more well-rounded understanding of human behavior (McLeod 2001) and an investment in multimethod approaches to research.

Teaching Qualitative Research: Epistemology and Method

Courses in qualitative research tend to begin with discussions of epistemology because students often are not aware of how epistemological choices influence method. An understanding of the philosophy of science underlying qualitative methods can provide students with a critical understanding of the origins of knowledge, subjectivity and objectivity, and research ethics (Ponterotto 2005; Wolcott 1994). Training in the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research also is considered important for the development of a qualitative stance, which "refers to challenges involved in using the self as an instrument of inquiry" (Poulin 2007, p. 436). This stance is seen as necessary for the development of skills that are important to a project's success, for example, listening skills, interpersonal skills, and the ability to facilitate the unfolding of participants' stories (Burawoy 1991).

One innovative way in which professors have attempted to balance the relative focus on theory and practice has been to provide in-class exercises (e.g., visual aids, role plays, reflective assignments, and class discussions; for examples of experimental activities, see Aronson, Fontes & Piercy 2000; Pope 2007; Poulin 2007) that allow students to enhance their fieldwork preparedness while considering pertinent theories (Hurworth 2004). In addition, increasing students' exposure to various methods of data collection, analysis, and theory can help them compare qualitative methods and epistemologies and make decisions about how to apply them to their research. This article continues this tradition of hands-on learning by having students conduct interviews and work both in small groups and with the class as a whole to engage in a process of analysis.

The literature on teaching qualitative methods has tended to focus on salient challenges for students learning qualitative research methods, such as difficulty shifting from a quantitative epistemological stance to a qualitative one (Booker 2009; Poulin 2007), discussing issues of power and oppression (e.g., Lincoln 1998), and initial bewilderment in trying to code qualitative data (Li & Seale 2007; Pope 2007). Furthermore, this literature emphasizes the need for professors to create a safe, collaborative environment where students can grapple with epistemological shifts, reflect upon their own researcher biases, and engage in discourse about issues of social power and marginalization (e.g., Booker 2009; Lincoln 1998). While these articles offer valuable lessons on how to meet these needs grounded in an individual mentorship model (Li & Seale 2007; Pope 2007) or in a survey course model (Booker 2009; Poulin 2007), the present article demonstrates how a research team project can be incorporated within a survey course to accomplish these goals.

Grounded theory was selected as the qualitative method for the class project for three main reasons: (1) It is a method that has gained acceptance in psychology and become known for its rigor (e.g., Fassinger 2005); (2) it allows the class to consider the different forms of grounded theory method that have been developed and compare their realist and relativist aspects (e.g., Glaser 1992; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Rennie 2000; Strauss & Corbin 1990) so the students can learn how methods change and are used differently in relation to investigators' contexts and beliefs; and (3) I like how elements of this method intersect with a variety of other methods and topics that I teach in the class.

For instance, as recommended by Rennie, Philips, and Quartaro (1988), I borrow meaning units from phenomenology as the method of structuring units for the analysis. Or when the topic of the week is hermeneutics, we discuss how, although there are different meanings and practices that have laid claim to this term (see Palmer 1969), Rennie (2000) argued that grounded theory is a form of methodical hermeneutics because it structures the interpretation of meaning from units of text and identifies patterns in the explicit and implicit meanings via the construction of hierarchical categories. Similarly, when discussing semiotics, we look at the meanings of central words and constructs in our analysis; and when discussing narrative we examine common plotlines that have emerged. In this way, many of the weekly topics can be tied to the analysis underway.

Benefits of a Research Team Model

This course was designed to foster students' understanding of the philosophies and methods behind qualitative research through experiential learning. Because this understanding often does not fit easily with their existing ideas about quantitative research, it can be important to create a "safe space for collaborative work" (Lincoln 1998), wherein instructors encourage students to engage with each other in attempting to master the new and sometimes daunting course material.

As some aspects of qualitative research are near impossible to understand through didactic instruction, they may be most effectively learned through experience (Lincoln 1998); this is precisely the kind of learning that students profit from within a research team model. Thus, in the present course, students advance to a level of proficiency by completing all stages of a grounded theory project with instructor guidance and peer-supervision at every step. They achieve a firsthand understanding of the process of qualitative inquiry and how to circumvent some of its challenges.

At the foundation of our research team is a constructivist approach to teaching in which the processes of interpretation (of both readings and research data) are explored and learning from the classroom interaction is seen as a central part of the course. This style of learning is in contrast to an approach in which learning entails receiving information from an instructor and assimilating it correctly. Our approach emphasizes (1) respect for students' existing assumptions within their developing understanding; (2) the facilitation of shared learning through group dialogue; (3) the integration of formal knowledge (i.e., prior literature) into group dialogue; (4) the welcoming of students' attempts to critically analyze existing knowledge structures; and (5) the provision of activities that foster students' meta-awareness of their assumptions and learning processes (Richardson 2003). Case studies (Hickcox 2002; Krockover et al. 2002) and phenomenological research (Maypole & Davies 2001) provide evidence that courses conducted within a learning framework such as this promote students' active engagement with course material, encourage critical thinking through self-reflection, and call on students to take responsibility for their learning. Indeed, Maypole and Davies (2001) found that students reported feeling a greater sense of autonomy when they used engagement in research, classroom interactions, and their background knowledge to develop new understandings than in other courses; an important gain in students' development of a researcher identity.

Course Description

This article is based upon the experience of teaching a qualitative methods course in a one-semester, seminar format with a class size of 5–15 graduate students. I would find it difficult to use this course design if the class contained many more students than this, particularly within such a short semester, because it would be hard to turn around assignments as quickly as would be necessary. The class is structured to take place weekly, in a three-hour meeting. The main components of the course include a survey of methods (which is taught via lectures and small exercises) and a class grounded theory project in which all the students participate. A weekly reaction paper assignment guides students to reflect upon the readings in the survey component of the course and a weekly project assignment guides them in the next steps of the team project (see Table 1).

It has taken five years teaching this course to develop this structure, in which the project steps are well integrated with the surveying of different methods and in which the steps of the project are sequenced so that a draft of a manuscript can be accomplished within a semester, but I am quite confident now when teaching that we will be able to reach this goal. Teacher and students must stay close to the course schedule in order to complete a grounded theory project within this time span, but some flexibility may be built into the syllabus should unexpected obstacles arise (see Timeline in Table 1). It is drawn along a 13-week semester, and I do not believe the project could be accomplished in fewer weeks (although it might if another method, such as a content analysis, was used for the central project). When I teach this course along a 14-week semester, I often use the extra class to provide some buffer in the coding stage of analysis.

The following sections of this article provide more detail on the main components of the course: (1) guiding a research team; (2) surveying qualitative methods; (3) interview training; and (4) conducting a grounded theory group project. The article then goes on to discuss (5) the preparation of the class manuscript and (6) the procedures that are followed once the semester ends in order to finalize the class paper for publication.

Guiding a Research Team

In the class, I (Levitt) begin the first meeting by talking explicitly about the class as a research team and providing guidelines for functioning. I emphasize the need to seek to understand each other's perspectives, especially in the face of differing opinions, and the learning that can happen as a result this process. Also, I foreshadow how we will be collaborating throughout the semester by initiating the class project immediately.

In the first class session, we develop the topic for our collective research project. Over the years, I have shifted how the research topic is decided. The first time I taught this class, I thought the students' investment in a joint project might be greater if the topic was decided upon mutually. I discovered toward the end of the semester, however, that while the students were all interested in the topic selected, we faced a problem because neither the students nor I had specific expertise in publishing within this area and our lack of familiarity with the relevant literature made it more difficult to make a contribution and slowed our publishing process (e.g., Levitt et al. 2006). Since that point, I have selected project topics in which I have expertise. This knowledge has helped me to guide students in selecting a theoretical question that can make important contributions. Also, it allows me to guide the literature reviews and the writing of discussion sections as well as in the process of submitting the completed manuscripts (i.e., Levitt, Ovrebo et al. 2009; Levitt, Rattanasampan et al. 2009; Levitt, Williams et al. 2009). I select topics that students might find interesting or to which they might relate or develop some sense of commitment (e.g., experiences of reading life-changing narrative, driving curiosities, social injustices). I emphasize, however, that even if the topic is not of central interest to them, the project is a vehicle for their own learning and what they learn can be transferred to other topics, although it might require thoughtful reflection on how to adapt the methods to suit their focus.

That being said, their assignment for the first week is to conduct part of a literature review to gather a range of articles. For instance, if we are studying minority stress, some of the students might be assigned to collect articles related to specific types of minority stress, and others might be assigned to look for articles of how it is treated in psychotherapy, or how it influences the workplace. They are asked to read these articles and communicate what they have learned to the class. In this way, the students begin with some understanding of the phenomenon being studied and also learn how to conceptualize and plan for a literature review. The articles are placed in a class project binder in my laboratory, where we collect materials that all the students can access (e.g., copies of transcripts, demographic questionnaires with no identifying information, students' memos that they feel comfortable sharing, and participants' written feedback).

Also in the first class, I introduce the students to the practice of memoing. We discuss the purposes of memoing as a way to record and contemplate biases, method-related decisions, coding decisions, and the theoretical development of our model. In the initial class, our memoing focuses upon each of our expectations, beliefs, backgrounds, and apprehensions in relation to the research question. Then we share these thoughts and discuss how our different backgrounds, assumptions and concerns might influence our investigation. These initial discussions tend to reveal students' insecurities as researchers and their concerns that either knowing too much will bias them or that not knowing enough will limit their contribution to the project. We discuss how awareness of their weaknesses can help researchers use caution appropriately throughout the protocol development, interviewing, and analysis. These notes become the first entry in the class' memo log and students are instructed to continuously update the log with their thoughts and coding ideas after their interviews and following each data analysis session.

In the first classes, we also discuss the students' attitudes toward qualitative research. In my experience, students who are taking the course as an elective tend to be enthused about the topic but unsure about the demands of qualitative research. In contrast, students who are required to take the course may have fears about qualitative research that need to be abated before they can comfortably engage in the course. I have encountered students who feared that qualitative research was incompatible with quantitative research or that conducting qualitative work might make them less marketable. It has been helpful to reassure students that I do not argue that quantitative methods should be abandoned. Rather, I assert that, as a researcher, I believe in having tools that enable the exploration of different questions at hand—which sometimes might necessitate either a quantitative or qualitative design. Talking openly about the threat entailed in stepping out of the traditions they are

Table 1
Course outline

Readings and lecture focus	Class project step taught in class	Class project homework	Reaction paper assignment due the following week
Week 1. Philosophy of human science	Learn the purpose of and begin memoing. Learn to review literature efficiently. Begin to design an interview protocol.	Review literature related to project question.	Review literature collected and draft interview questions to bring to class.
Week 2. Preparing to interview: Interview skills, ethics, and memoing	Refine interview protocol and decide on demographic questions. Learn interviewing skills and role playing interviewing. Consider ethics in interviewing and data collection. Instructions on how to continue to memo throughout class.	Practice interviewing. Arrange interview to occur soon after the next class.	Reflect upon readings assigned in the last two weeks, given your background and the epistemologies you have learned so far. Consider your goals for this class and your experience preparing to interview. How do these readings mesh or conflict with your personal philosophy? How should your style of interviewing reflect these philosophies?
Week 3. History of social science inquiry and dualism within inquiry	Continue interview role playing and feedback. Discuss science as evolving in meaning and how interviewing style might differ depending on one's epistemology.	Conduct and transcribe your interview.	Review your interview and critique it, considering the readings on interviewing and ethics. Set goals for future interviews. Prepare a paragraph summarizing central points in your interview.
Week 4. Phenomenology and meaning units (MUs)	Discuss the interviewing process. Learn to divide text into meaning units and consider essences. Learn to import interview into Nvivo computer program. Attempt to input a few MUs but get feedback before inserting all.	Divide interview into meaning units. Use tildas to indicate unit divisions.	Reflect upon MUs and develop a phenomenological understanding of your interview by examining commonalities and considering the essence described in your MUs. Can you articulate an "essence" of your phenomenon?

Week 5. Hermeneutics	Discuss identifying both the content and implicit meanings within text. Learn to identify categories of MUs. Answer questions about inputting meaning units and learn to input categories in Nvivo.	Input the rest of your meaning units into Nvivo. Organize MUs from your own interview into initial categories.	Based upon the readings, what type of hermeneutics holds the most interest for you? Build an interpretation of one "unspoken idea" based upon your analysis of textual cues—look for signs of class, race, gender, unconscious ideas, or social assumptions. Examine and illustrate patterns of explicit and implicit meanings within your interview transcript. Notice how interpretations can influence one another. Refer to Packer's article for an example.
Week 6. Grounded theory	Discuss the process of how to create categories. Discuss how different forms of grounded theory would lead to different analytic steps. Discuss how to work in groups, to be inclusive, and to prioritize the interpretation of the interviewer of any specific interview.	Meet in pairs or small groups, input your meaning units, and review them in relation to everyone else's. Create initial categories.	Reflect upon readings and on the process of constant comparison. Consider how to use theoretical sampling. Please prepare a list of the upper (and encompassing lower) categories you have created to be distributed to the class and discussed.
Week 7. Feminist analysis and discourse analysis	Discuss the relationship of power to themes in the current project. Discuss how to create second level categories.	Meet in groups and continue to move categories into higher-order categories.	Reflect upon readings and identify the ways power dynamics might be present in the concerns discussed in your interview. Discuss the types of discourses used by your interviewee within their interview.

(*Continued*)

Table 1
(Continued)

Readings and lecture focus	Class project step taught in class	Class project homework	Reaction paper assignment due the following week
Week 8. Postmodernism	Review the emerging hierarchy in the class. Begin to discuss ideas for clusters.	Meet in groups and continue to move categories into fewer higher-order categories.	Reflect upon the readings and consider them in relation to the project and the perspective of your interviewee. How might a postmodernist view the reports given by your interviewee?
Week 9. Semiotics and deconstruction	Discuss how to write feedback letters to your participants. Review hierarchy in class and decide upon final clusters in class. Discuss the process of developing a core category.	Meet in groups and continue to move categories into fewer higher-order categories and consider possible core category options.	Have feedback letter to participants and accompanying questionnaires with descriptions of the clusters ready to be approved. What are the symbols that hold the most meaning for your participant? Identify the meanings.
Week 10. The assessment of credibility	Consider the types of credibility checks used in this project and ways to continue to improve the project. Divide into groups to write the final paper.	Meet in groups to review hierarchy to remove redundancies and clarify language.	Have sent out your completed feedback letter and questionnaire. Reflect upon your memoing—has it improved the projects' credibility? What have your learned in conducting this project?
Week 11. Rhetoric and the writing of qualitative research	Learn how to write each section of a qualitative paper. Prepare an outline of what each section will include.	Meet in groups to work on your section.	Draft of your section. Describe the forms of rhetoric you used in writing.
Week 12. Narrative analysis and task analysis	Discuss the relationship of storytelling to academic writing. Consider how to shape our article to tell a story about our data.	Continue revising your section of the class paper in relation to the whole draft.	Personal epistemology reflection paper due.
Week 13. Integration and conclusion	Consider how the project findings would have differed using the different methods taught.	Continue revising your section of the class paper in relation to the whole draft.	Final paper section due.

familiar with (as most of the students in my classes have a strong quantitative background) has set the stage for students becoming open to new epistemologies.

Integrating the Survey Component with the Class Project

Following this introduction, the team begins class each week by reviewing the project homework that the students have been working on during the week (see Table 1) and addressing any questions that arose in that process. Afterwards, I lead a discussion on the readings assigned for that week. I tend to begin discussions by asking the students to share points of interest or questions that emerged while they were reading. The end of each class is spent orienting the students to the next step of the project—the homework task for the following week.

The survey component of the class involves readings that provide exposure to research design issues (e.g., interviewing skills, credibility assessment, the rhetoric and politics of publishing qualitative research) and different methods of research (e.g., participatory action, content analysis, grounded theory). The course is designed so that the topic for the week complements the corresponding stage of the class project whenever possible. Although we cannot describe how all of the topics are approached within the confines of this article, Table 1 provides a brief description of the assignments that the students are prepared to conduct and that then structure some of the discussion of each of the individual methods. For instance, the first week's readings focus on the philosophy of human science. These readings are helpful at the outset of the course as they build students' awareness of their epistemological biases and engage them in the process of memoing.

To provide more examples of how the survey topics and the grounded theory project intersect, the readings for the second class focus upon interviewing techniques (Patton 1990; Polkinghorne 2005a) and aid the class in preparing to conduct an interview for the class project (a process which is the focus of the following section). The third week lecture and readings on phenomenology (McLeod 2001; Wertz 2005) are scheduled at the point when students have transcribed interviews are ready to break their interviews into meaning units, a process developed by a phenomenologist (i.e., Giorgi 1985).

By linking different topics in the survey component of the class to exercises they are performing for the class project, students can develop a deeper understanding of these methods. Because each student conducts one interview toward the start of the course, students can analyze their transcript using the research methods surveyed. This allows them to notice how different aspects of their participant's story may come forward, depending on the method selected and also encourages a complex engagement with the interview text. This process also exemplifies how different sets of findings are not necessarily evidence of a faulty analysis but rather might reflect different tools of analysis.

Each week, students write a one-page single-spaced reaction paper. Occasionally, when the task for that week is very demanding (e.g., writing a feedback letter to participants), the reaction papers are focused exclusively on the process of completing that step. More typically though, students are encouraged to integrate within these papers their reactions to both the readings and lectures in the survey component of the class and their activities for the class project, often being asked to reflect on how a given method relates to the project analysis or to their interview.

Interview Preparation and Training

We begin developing the interview question that will become the basis for our class project in our first meeting. As the students suggest questions to examine, we discuss the importance of phrasing questions in a nonbiasing manner and the organizing of questions from more general to more specific within the interview. Over the next two classes, which are focused on interview training, we continue to revise and change the main question and subquestions that are meant to help elucidate the responses to the central question. Indeed, we may even refine questions following feedback from those students who complete earlier interviews.

Each student conducts one interview for the purpose of the class project (the completion of any additional interviews will be discussed later in the article). I have asked the students to post advertisements following the first class in order to find participants, but when participants may be difficult to find (e.g., interviewing gay and lesbian people), I begin the semester with a precomposed list of participants that I distribute to the class.

After an initial protocol is developed in the first class, interview training begins, including some interview modeling by the instructor as well as student role-plays. Students receive feedback from the instructor and from one another as they role-play in small groups of three (interviewer, interviewee, and an observer whose role is to provide feedback and to help the interviewer and at his/her behest). I encourage students to provide to one another both positive and constructive feedback to aid their development. I circulate among the groups and provide feedback to each student interviewer. In addition to the interview experience in class, students are expected to conduct a mock-interview out of class, evaluate their own performance and bring questions to the following class. We conduct role-plays in two classes.

Interview training centers on three main topics. First, we discuss the importance of the interviewer's behavior and the reasons why an attitude of nonjudgmental listening and curiosity leads to stronger data collection (and what types of responses signify this attitude). Because many of the students in my classes are from clinical or counseling psychology, they tend to already be strong in demonstrating an accepting and open listening style; however, not all students have the benefit of this background. Also, I describe to students how to react to an offensive or upsetting comment made by an interviewee and explain how as these can be opportunities for deeper comprehension of a phenomenon.

For instance, I share how, when I interviewed religious leaders regarding their thoughts on domestic violence (Levitt & Ware 2006), some told me that women deserve to be beaten because of original sin. When I interviewed psychotherapy clients about their treatment, one described how he would have preferred an Aryan therapist (Levitt, Butler & Hill 2006). When I responded to interviewee comments that were offensive to me with curiosity and intrigue, interviewees elaborated further and I was able to recognize dynamics and pressures that might have remained hidden had I reacted with judgment.

The second training topic focuses on how to keep the interviewee on topic. For students who feel rude when interrupting or redirecting the interviewee, this process can be a struggle. The need for direction often becomes clear, however, after having to transcribe and evaluate pages of off-topic interview. To help, we practice "nice" ways to interrupt interviewees (e.g., "Sorry – I'm getting confused. Can you help me connect what you are saying to [topic]?").

Finally, I demonstrate how to seek clarification from interviewees of any ambiguous responses that might be interpreted in multiple ways and we discuss how the analysis is compromised when these responses are not elaborated. Most importantly, metaphors, emotion words, and slang are to be explored because they can mean different things across speakers. Some students feel embarrassed to ask for clarification because they worry they will annoy the interviewee or will look less knowledgeable. To help, interviewers are encouraged to tell participants at the outset that they will need to ask for clarification at times, even if they think they understand what is being said, for the purpose of the class' comprehension. This open acknowledgement can free the students to seek out thorough and useful data.

I encourage the students to seek feedback from their interviewee at the conclusion of the interview, by asking questions such as: "Was there anything that I did not ask that was important?," "Is there any feedback you can give me to help me make future participants feel more comfortable?," "Is there anything about me (e.g., being a student, white) that you think might have influenced what you shared with me?" These questions not only act as checks on the comprehensiveness of the interviews but also provide students with an opportunity to gather any data that might have been missed. The students each compose a one-page summary of the highlights of their interview. We share these in class with one another when discussing the interview experience so that the students all develop a sense of the entire data set before we enter the analysis stage.

Although I provide extensive transcription guidelines (see Mergenthaler & Stinton 1992) for the students' consideration, I ask students to use only a few select indicators in our class project (e.g., to identify words that are inaudible via slashes, and indicate guesses at the intended meaning whenever possible—"It happened on ///// (?: a Sunday after the game)"). In addition, the students act as a confidentiality screen and are asked to remove any identifying information in the transcript. Each student is aware of his/her participant's identity but only I, as project director, have access to all the participants' identities.

Conducting a Grounded Theory Class Project

Although the timeline and focus of this article are based upon using a grounded theory project as the central activity of the course, the basic structure could be adapted for a project using another method. As most qualitative methods entail stages of study planning, interviewing, data analysis, and writing, there are points of commonalities across many methods.

Structuring the Project. The quick pace of the class also necessitates that the instructor is able to provide rapid feedback to students. For instance, when the students submit their initial meaning units and levels of categories, I provide feedback within two or three days so they can have the remainder of the week to revised meaning units or categories and bring them to the next class for me to approve. Feedback often entails detailed notes on their transcripts that provide a multitude of examples of what a good response would entail (either in interviewing, coding, analysis), highlight the thinking processes that I think might be helpful, and point out any errors that are being made. I often provide detailed feedback on a large segment of the transcript (until I feel the student has enough examples to understand the concept being illustrated). When giving feedback on coding or analysis, I ask the student to make corrections on the rest of the transcript using my examples. Then, I review a corrected version to ensure that the student is on-track before they input their data into the class project.

To guide students through the project, I have created a "project task descriptions file" that provides examples of each step of the project. This document, which has been refined over years of teaching this course, includes the transcription guidelines, illustrates how to create meaning units from a transcript excerpt, provides instructions on how to create initial and higher order categories, and includes example hierarchies, letters requesting participant feedback, and questionnaires on findings. Each student receives a copy of this file and a copy is also left in the class project binder. This file is referred to when students are instructed in a new step of the project, and students refer to this file as they move through the project stages in small groups. It has been requested by multiple other instructors and graduates of this class who reportedly found it to be useful in developing their own courses or shaping their qualitative supervision. Highlights from that file are presented in the next five sections of this paper.

Identifying Meaning Units: Tips and Guidelines. Over the course of the class, two project steps tend to be the most time consuming for students. The first is completing their interview transcription and the second is creating initial categories by comparing their meaning units to the other students' units. Because there are no exams or lengthy essay papers due in this class, I encourage the students to consider these tasks as requiring the time that would be spent studying intensely for an exam or writing a research paper or essay. In addition, I indicate in the syllabus that the course requires small group work on a computer in my laboratory outside of class as it has the software necessary for data analysis.

In this process, the first step the students engage in is the breaking down of their own transcript into meaning units (see Giorgi 1985), as suggested in the method worked out by Rennie, Philips, and Quartaro (1988), or what grounded theory practitioners sometimes call *open coding*. After this step, they input the units in small teams of two or three students so that they can review each others' units and labels. From that point on, all the analysis (i.e., the creation of most of the initial categories and all of the increasingly higher level categories) is conducted in their small group or in the class discussions. This first step, however, involves breaking the interview into units of text that each contain one main meaning relevant to the question driving the interviews and the research, and assigning each unit a descriptive label. To instruct them on how to do this, I assign a reading (see Giorgi 1985 in Table 2) that illustrates this process, we create meaning units together in class using a mock-transcript, and I provide the example (see Table 3) to illustrate the process. As well, I give them feedback on both their initial attempt at creating units and then on their revised units.

In my experience, students tend to encounter three main challenges when identifying meaning units. First, students are tempted to create meaning units and labels that reflect their text, but do not relate to the question driving the project, particularly if they had trouble keeping their interview on topic. I provide examples to encourage them to write their meaning unit labels so that they all contain an answer to the main question in the interview. For instance, if the topic is the experience of becoming a teacher and an interviewee tells you about her aunt who is teacher with whom she went to an antique store, you may have a meaning unit called, "She admired an aunt who is a teacher." The lengthy segment about picking out a china bull or deciding if she wanted a crystal vase is irrelevant to the question and does not need to have its own meaning unit.

The second common problem is labeling the unit without contextual information that is important to its interpretation. For instance, if a unit is labeled "pupils become excited about learning," the reader does not know understand the context of the statement—learning what? The graduate students are encouraged to create labels that fellow students can read and understand without having to look back through the interview text. I encourage students to place a few words before a colon to provide context when the response is one to a question in the interview protocol, for instance, "my main concern: that pupils become excited about learning to read."

The third most frequent challenge is labeling units in such a way that the meaning in the unit is not dismantled. This issue occurs most often when a study is exploring the relationship between two phenomena. For instance, if a study focuses on the experience

Table 2
Readings list

Week	Readings
Week 1	Bakan, D 1954; Ponterotto, J 2005; Haverkamp, BE 2005
Week 2	Patton, MQ 1990, chapter 7; Polkinghorne, DE 2005a, b
Week 3	Danziger, K 1990, chapter 9; Faye, B 1996, chapter 11
Week 4	Giorgi, A 1985; McLeod, J 2001, chapter 3; Wertz, FJ 2005
Week 5	McLeod, J 2001, chapters 2 & 4; Packer, MJ 1985
Week 6	McLeod, J 2001, chapter 6; Fassinger, RE 2005; Rennie, DL 2000
Week 7	Burman, E 1999; Parker, I 1999; Taylor, M 1999
Week 8	Ryan, BA 1999; Tester, K 1993, chapters 1 & 6
Week 9	Gergen, K 1985; Lehman, D 1991, chapters 3 & 4
Week 10	Elliott, R, Fischer, C & Rennie, DL 1999; McLeod, J 2001, chapter 11; Morrow, SL 2005
Week 11	Bazerman, C 1987; Fischer, CT 1999; Rennie, DL 1995
Week 12	Krippendorff, K 1980; McLeod, J 2001, chapter 7; Polkinghorne, DE 1988, chapter 5
Week 13	Hanson et al. 2005; Ponterotto, JG & Grieger, I 1999; Shaddish, WR 1995

of being a woman construction worker, then the focus of interview and the meaning unit titles should describe the *intersection* of these two identities (e.g., "As a woman, I am less accepted by my fellow workers and then I don't get offered as many opportunities"). If the relationship between these elements is disconnected into two meaning units (e.g., "I feel less accepted as a woman" and "At work, I don't get offered many opportunities"), the central meaning can be lost—the relationship between these ideas.

Although the students create their own meaning units, I give them detailed feedback on all the units in their interview and then ask them to pair up to input the unit labels into the Nvivo program (QSR International Pty Ltd.). In pairing up, students check with each other that their meaning unit titles make sense to someone who is less familiar with their interview.

Creating a Hierarchy of Categories: Tips and Guidelines. After students have generated and received feedback on their meaning unit titles, they move to creating categories. While Strauss and Corbin (1990) use a method of axial coding in which they use the framework provided by a set of questions to help organize the data (e.g., what are the contexts or consequences being described), our class uses the process of constant comparison to create categories (as do Glaser 1992 and Glaser & Strauss 1967). Although they first create some initial level categories within their own transcript by identifying commonalities between their own meaning units (so they can receive feedback individually), most of the initial categories are formed in their small groups. In the process of constant comparison, they compare every meaning unit in their interviews to every other meaning unit in the project and create categories based upon the commonalities they observe. This initial comparison is the most time intensive task and it can be necessary to have a couple of weeks to engage in this process. The troubleshooting provided for the meaning unit labels in the previous section also applies to the creation of category labels, but the following are some additional

Table 3
Identifying meaning units and labels

Transcript text	Meaning unit label	Rationale
Interviewer (I): Tell me about your experience of grief. Participant (P): I felt a lot of grief after my father died.	Felt grief after father dying	I want to stay with the participants' language and meaning as much as possible and so don't write "sad because father died" or another variation.
It was a painful experience and I felt terribly sad for a while afterwards. I just felt a lot of pain really.	Father's death: Pain and sadness for a while	I am providing this context "Father's death" as it will help other classmates understand the context when this unit is mixed into the hierarchy.
When I heard about his death I was teaching at this high school and I was in the middle of a class. The principle came and called me out of my class at about 1:45 and I had another two hours really in my day. I teach algebra at (name of high school). I've been teaching there for ten years now. I really enjoy kids a lot and like teaching. Instead of leaving then, I decided to stay in the class and continue to teach as I thought it was what my father would have wanted.	I worked after death as father would have wanted	I have left this segment as a longer unit because the details of her teaching aren't relevant to her experience of grief. I find one meaning relevant to the interview and research question at hand.
I was sad for a long time. Probably about a year of just having a sadness within me.	Father's death: Sadness within me for a year	Again, providing context for the classmates will be important. Think about whether you would understand the meaning in the unit if you hadn't read the transcript from the label alone.
(Sister) couldn't really understand what was going on with me.	Sister couldn't understand my sadness	I add "sadness" because it is the feeling mentioned just before and I think the class may need to have that cue to understand this unit.
It was easier for her to get over. She is a dancer and she seemed perfectly fine about a month later.	Sister was fine a month after father's death, unlike me	I've indicated "sister" so the interpersonal context is understood. I didn't mention that she was a dancer because it isn't clear how it relates to the experience of grief.
When my cat died, I got over it much quicker. It wasn't so hard for me. I knew I could get another cat, as much as I missed my own. I knew that the space she held in my life would eventually be filled, but I knew that I would never have another father.	Mourning cat is faster vs. father, as cat is replaceable	Here I've used words of my own, while staying close to the meaning of the text because it was hard to identify a succinct label from the client's words. I connect the cat and father because the meaning of the comparison would be lost if I separated them.

guidelines I provide to students when they are in the process of creating categories and category labels.

1. Avoid having two categories that share the same meaning (e.g., "Don't want to pass for straight" and "Want to be visible as lesbian").
2. Avoid creating categories that reflect the *questions* asked in the interview versus the *answers* provided to those questions (e.g., "Things I dislike about being lesbian" is not a good label, while "I worry about the repercussions of not being recognized as a legal parent for my child" is better).
3. Avoid polarized categories. If one category reads, "Don't like being a lesbian" and another reads, "I like being a lesbian," the reader does not understand why these differing opinions exist. It is better to combine these meanings in one category in a way that says *when* one opinion holds versus another or why there is this difference in opinion (e.g., "I don't like being lesbian when I face discrimination, but I like my family in all other respects").
4. Have a longer meaningful category title rather than a concise one that is hard to interpret (e.g., "Tensions in my relationship" will be hard for other analysts to interpret, whereas "Experiencing workplace harassment adds tension into my romantic relationship" is a clearer title).
5. Check over categories once they contain more than five or six meaning units or subcategories. Although I emphasize that it is possible to have a large number of meaning units or subcategories, sometimes this indicates that there are subcategories to be identified or that the category label might be too broad.

After creating initial categories, the class moves to comparing these categories to one another and creating higher order categories based on the commonalities they identify between them (and then this process is repeated to form a hierarchy of categories). There are two additional guidelines that I provide when students are creating higher-level categories:

1. Keep meaning units and category titles organized on different levels. Sometimes students will be tempted to move some meaning units into a higher level of the hierarchy instead of organizing them into a subcategory, which makes the hierarchy confusing to read.
2. Avoid creating higher order category labels that comprise a list of properties of the lower order category labels (e.g., When activists began working in shelters, they refused to recognize sexism, doubted statistics, and questioned the purpose of feminism). The higher order label is meant to reflect the *commonality* between lower order categories and you want to identify what that commonality is in a concise manner (e.g., Initial stage of activism: the denial of oppression).

Developing categories in groups of two or three provides students with greater confidence as well as the opportunity to check that their category titles are clear to others in the research team. As well, the groups provide consensus for interpretation of the data while the coding is happening. Another advantage of teamwork is that some students are more computer savvy than others and can guide those classmates who struggle more with technology. To help students, I have created with one of my graduate students (thanks to Jennifer Henretty) a condensed guide for using Nvivo within this class project; this is distributed within the project task descriptions handout.

After five or six interviews are added into the hierarchy, I ask the students to keep track of the number of new categories that are created when each new interview is added and at what levels these are added. In grounded theory, the point at which adding new data does not contribute new understandings within the hierarchy is called saturation. This point suggests that the hierarchy is comprehensive and data collection can cease. Lower level categories tend to contain more concrete and localized meanings and are more indicative of approaching saturation than higher level categories. The students keep a log sheet at the computer that helps them to keep track of this process, which we review in class.

The Interpersonal Process of Creating the Hierarchy. There are several levels of consensus utilized in this project. First, I review each transcript and provide feedback on each student's meaning units and initial categories. The students also provide feedback to one another as they work in small groups to create the hierarchy.

We also print out the hierarchy and review it; talking each week in class about any struggles students encountered or questions they have memoed. In this way, we review difficult coding decisions so consensus is obtained within the class as a whole. In the process of working toward consensus, we follow two general rules: (1) multiple understandings are positive and useful so long as they do not contradict each other; and (2) in accordance with an epistemology that values investigators' experience with a phenomenon, the investigator who interviewed a particular participant is recognized as having access to nonverbal and social cues that the class lacks; therefore, his or her interpretation of that text is privileged over that of the other investigators. As we move to the top two levels, we review in class the organization of the data and form the category labels collectively.

In general, I find that students work together well through this collaborative process. If anything, they tend to be overly respectful of each other's opinions. Indeed, one challenge that often needs addressing is the resistance to altering the coding decisions of other students and I may encourage them repeatedly to move or edit each others' categories in order to create higher levels of the hierarchy, sharpen meanings, or clarify ambiguous category names. It seems helpful to point out that students can memo and bring into class any questions they have about coding, that they have the opportunity to refine their classmates' changes if they feel the original meaning was lost in editing, and that we will discuss changes that were made to the hierarchy in class; therefore, changes should not be considered final. By the end of this process, all the students should feel that the hierarchy reflects the important themes about the project topic that were conveyed by their participants, although the hierarchy may contain themes that an individual participant did not address as well.

Seeking Participant Feedback. Finally, we seek feedback from participants by conducting member check surveys. If the course were longer, it might be possible to ask students to meet with their participants again to review findings and seek oral feedback, but because of the tight timeline I have students individually prepare written summaries of the findings to distribute to the participants they interviewed (after my review), typically by e-mail. For these feedback forms, the students write a paragraph summarizing the core category and each uppermost level category, and ask the participants how well each description fits their understanding of the phenomenon. In this manner, all the students obtain some experience with writing up our qualitative findings. Students request both a qualitative response as well as a quantitative rating for each highest order category. This feedback is discussed in class and also added into the results section in the draft of the class paper.

Preparing a Draft of the Manuscript

To write the article, I divide the class up so that students are working on the sections that reflect their strengths. By this point in the course, I am quite familiar with the students' writing styles, academic interests, and analytic skills. For instance, I usually assign students who are more familiar with the relevant literature to work on the introduction section. Also, whenever possible, I assign more students to write the results section than the other sections because it is usually the longest section to write. Before they begin writing, I review the ways each section of a qualitative paper is distinct from a quantitative paper. For instance, we discuss how in the introduction, writers often are asked to provide a rationale to justify why they have elected to use qualitative methods. As well, we describe how in the method section, the student(s) must include a description of the researchers' initial biases or perspectives, a section on interviewing, a section describing the use of grounded theory analysis, and a section on method-related checks (in which assessments of rigor are described, such as credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability; see Lincoln & Guba 1985).

I provide for them the following template for the results section: (a) begin the section with a paragraph describing the number of meaning units and levels in the analysis, an orientation to the rest of the section, and a chart of the top levels of the hierarchy; (b) divide the body of the results section into subsections which each focus on a second-highest level category; and (c) end with a subsection describing the core category that describes how the category title was generated from the subsections already described and that foreshadows the subsections to come in the discussion section. Then, within each subsection of the body the students provide: (i) an overview of that second-highest level category and the number of participants who contributed to it and (ii) a paragraph focused on each category therein that begins with a sentence or two describing its contents and the number of participants who contributed to it, contains a quotation that vividly brings to life the meaning of that category, and then ends with a sentence that ties this quotation back into the meaning of the category.

In preparation for writing the discussion section, we consider in class how to present the project's limitations (e.g., the transferability limits of our participant group, the need to interpret our theory as one interpretation rooted in empirical analysis as opposed to the only possible interpretation) and strengths (e.g., use of consensus, use of credibility checks) in the discussion section. We consider the implications of our findings for the literature that was reviewed. As well we consider future research, teaching, and practice implications.

In this class, we generate outlines of each section so all the students have input into the entire paper. Students are requested to submit a complete draft of their assigned section two weeks before the end of class so they can receive detailed feedback from me before submitting a final draft. I also provide examples of previous class publications for the students to use as models as they write their own sections.

At the Conclusion of the Course

At the conclusion of the course, we have a draft of an article to be submitted to journal review. In addition, the students have engaged in an experiential learning process and now understand qualitative research and what it entails. They often have expressed that they are both surprised at the level of effort entailed in doing qualitative work and are excited about the rich results that can be produced.

At the end of the class, I congratulate the students on the draft they have completed; they tend to seem pleased with what they have accomplished. Still, typically more work is required in order to get the article ready for submission. When the class size is small (e.g., five students), we may need volunteers to conduct additional interviews so we can seek saturation. I am careful not to ask volunteers to become involved until the end of the class so as not to communicate to students that volunteering (or not) might influence their grades. By the end of the course, I always have had some students who feel invested in the project and are willing to continue working on it. Even if saturation is reached, however, the manuscript usually needs to go through few drafts to move it to a professional level.

We discuss authorship overtly. I (Levitt) am listed as the first author on the manuscript as I will have designed the study, conducted the training, reviewed all the interviews, meaning units and categories, helped form the hierarchy, provided detailed feedback on the writing, and will, from the completion of the course forward, shepherd the paper through the review process. The students' names typically are listed in alphabetical order; however, I move up the names of those students who volunteer after the class has concluded to recognize their additional contribution. At this point, we have published an article from each class that has been taught using this structure (e.g., Levitt et al. 2006; Levitt, Ovrebo et al. 2009; Levitt, Rattanasampan et al. 2009; Levitt, Williams et al. 2009). These articles have been published in well-respected journals.

Because the assignments in the qualitative course are reaction papers, essays, and parts of the class projects that change depending on the research topic and because most students enter the class with little or no knowledge of qualitative research methods, assignments do not lend themselves to a pre- and post-test study as an evaluation of this course. The publication of the class projects, however, do provide empirical evidence that the work produced in this class structure meets the high academic standards of a peer review process and prepares students to do the kind of work that they would be expected to do postgraduation.

In terms of the students' evaluation of the course, ratings have been overwhelmingly positive. Means for the course were computed for the two questions that were held constant across changing evaluation forms and that answer the central questions of teaching effectiveness and the students' sense of competency in the subject being taught ($N = 32$). The questions were rated using a Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. The first question, "Instructor was an effective teacher," received a mean of 1.11 (SD = 0.18). The second question, "I have become more competent due to this course," received a mean rating of 1.17 (SD = 0.19).

The grades in the course are based upon the students' personal philosophy paper, the final section of the class project (their initial draft submitted is not graded but provides them feedback), and the reaction papers submitted each week. In the personal philosophy paper, students evaluate their own evolving epistemologies and methods of interest. I encourage them to think about how they or their identities as researchers have shifted as a result of the course. In this exercise, I encourage them not to disavow quantitative research but instead to consider the questions they are exploring in their programs of research and evaluate if, when, and why forms of qualitative research would be useful within these paradigms. Our discussion of their research plans, stimulated by this article, stresses the value of methodological diversity (Neimeyer & Diamond 2001) and encourages students to continue experimenting with alternate ways of thinking about empiricism and research.

Since beginning to teach this course, I have changed academic affiliations and am teaching qualitative methods at a new institution now. As a result, I am adapting the class to a new student body. Because of the challenges of bringing small groups of students together at a commuter campus outside of class hours, I've been contemplating storing the project files on a password-protected drive on-line that can be accessed from off campus, although security issues would have to be addressed. Other innovations that I am considering include having students write one-paragraph summaries of the articles they collect to facilitate writing the literature review at the end of the course, and having the students conduct a more structured evaluation of their mock-interview after the second week's class as part of their reaction paper to facilitate a critical reflection of their interviewing skills. In any case, each year I am excited by the work produced by this class, the level of engagement in the applied project, and the evolution of the students' research knowledge and identities and I look forward to continuing to teach this course into the future.

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