Qualitative Inquiry in a Distance-based Environment: Thoughts and Tips

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Objectives

• Acquire a better knowledge of how technology can transform the process of the qualitative inquiry.

• Gain a better understanding of the unique aspects of an online-based qualitative study.

• Develop a better awareness of existent distance-based tools that can enhance the design and promote the completion of an online-based qualitative project.
Introductory Exercise

Do you have any experience with online/distance-based education or research process?

YES

Quickly re-examine the experiences that you have had so far. What stands out? What comes to mind?
Introductory Exercise

Do you have any experience with online/distance-based education or research process?

NO

Think about your assumptions about online education/research.

- What questions would you like to ask?
- What would excite you about taking an online class or being engaged in a research project online?
- What would worry you?
Introductory Exercise

Tell us the first three words that came to your mind to describe for you your thoughts about “online education/research”.

Introductions

- Yulia
- Darren
- Debi
## History of Online Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Students Enrolled in Higher Education</th>
<th># of Online Students Enrolled in Higher Education</th>
<th>% of Online Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall, 2007</td>
<td>18.2 Million</td>
<td>3.9 Million</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall, 2010</td>
<td>21 Million</td>
<td>6.1 Million</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>20.6 Million</td>
<td>6.7 Million</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current Trends of Online Education

- Continuum of offerings
- Required adaptations (e.g., gainful employment)
- Expansion into graduate programs
- International expansion
Common Pitfalls of Online Education

- Utilization of the Medium
- Adaptation of Curriculum
- Human Resources Considerations
Our Study: Institutional Context

- Faculty and Administrators in a Primarily Graduate Degree Online Environment
  - What does it mean to be a researcher?
  - Student’s Engagement

- Institutional Support
  - University intention to enhance research culture
  - MFS vision for a doctoral program
Method

- Research Design: Collective Case Study.
- Sample: 4 full time teaching faculty, 4 administrators, selected from four Schools (SOE, SOP, SOB, SMFS).
- IRB process of a distance-based University
- Data Collection: Interviews conducted through Webex.
Establishing engagement between co-investigators
  ◦ Bi-Weekly meetings through Webex
  ◦ Continuous conversation via email
  ◦ Synchronous and Asynchronous

Engagement Factors
  ◦ Sustained effort
  ◦ Three dimensionality of the online environment
  ◦ Greater intentionality
Engagement with Participants

- Interviewing method
- Structure of an interview conducted online
- What does it mean to be anonymous online?
Data Analysis

- Interviews transcribed
- 1st Stage Coding: Value and Versus Coding
- 2nd Stage Coding: Pattern Coding

(Saldana, 2013)
Preliminary Findings

Faculty

Responsibility Flexibility Optimism

Empathic Engagement

Pride Quality Strategies Self-care Technology
Preliminary Findings

Administrator

Uniqueness Focused Nature/Skilled

Empathic Engagement Quality

Qualifications Flexibility Strategy

Consistency
Supporting Quotes: Faculty

- “I am here for students” (FP2)
- “I am an online convert” (FP1)
- “This is what I tell them [my students]: “this is what I do, and I am here for you”. (FP3)
- “I like to do my work to a level when I feel like students are actually moving forward, they are gaining and they are acknowledging that” (FP4).
“[Feedback from faculty] came across very personalized, very specific to a student, so it’s not just a cookie cutter” (AP2)

[Feedback from faculty] is heavily influenced by one individual student” (AP1)

“[Faculty] is organized, engaging to students, accessible to students” (AP4)

“The most efficient strategies come from faculty” (AP3)
Online Environment Paradigm

- Perception of cyberspace as distant and cold
- Language that we use to describe online education
  - Virtual
  - Distance-based
- Less than brick and mortar
Online Environment Paradigm

- What are some words that we could use to describe our experience?

- How to explain online environment without comparing it to a brick a mortar environment?

- Would it be helpful to create a new language?
Wrap-up Exercise

Three words that describe Online research and education experience following
• Amirault, R. J. (2012). Distance learning in the 21st century university: key issues for leaders and faculty. The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 13(4), 253-265.


• LaPrade, K., Gilpatrick, M., & Perkins, D. (2014). Impact of reflective practice on online teaching performance in higher education. MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 10(4), 625-639
References


